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"With a sudden cry of protest, protest against the possibilities of disaster to her hopes that lay within the moment, she took down the receiver."—Page 491.

THE MILLS OF MAMMON

BY

JAMES H. BROWER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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AND

HENDERSON HOWK

JOLIET, ILL., U. S. A.

P. H. MURRAY & COMPANY

1909

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THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

"With a sudden cry of protest, protest against the possibilities of disaster to her hopes that lay within the moment, she took down the receiver."—Page 491. Frontispiece.

"I swan ef I hain't most forgot all I wanted to ask you—a-seein' that pesky nigger a diddlin' an' a daddlin' with that carpet."—Page 65.

"A handful * * * finally went up to offer advice, criticism and caution, but the "PILLARS" stood firm.—Page 102.

"—— and here, wolves, human wolves, devour this beauty, and feast their eyes upon her flesh alone."—Page 164.

"* * * d'youse hear me! Youse killed him, an' dese here men knows it."—Page 213.

"I will follow you to the ends of the earth and hire, with my kisses, some other little dog to put you away. Now go!" —Page 246.

"They ain't no priest ner sky-pilot goin' t' say a word t' God fer youse, an' God knows I ain't."—Page 371.

"The first one of you to lift a hand will beat the other one to hell by about three seconds."—Page 448.

THE MAD MAMMON-WORSHIPING WORLD.*

Strange! But isn't it so?
That a man feels good when he's beaten another
And fastened himself on the back of a brother!
Isn't it passing strange?

But isn't it so?
With Jacob, we bargain at Esau's cost;
We're pleased with profits the hired have lost;
As gods turned devils we call for rents;
As usurers, gloat over cent per cents;
Our riches, religion and culture we roll,
A straining mass, on each body and soul
Of the landless class. We double their toil,
And feast as leeches on those who moil;
And then—and then, we patronize workers
And proudly fellowship robbers and shirkers!
Strange! Isn't it so?

God pity, with workers 'tis so!
For among all classes is eager desire
To rank and grade and to climb up higher,
Away from the grime and smell of the soil,
Away from the need of physical toil,
Away from the vulgar, serving masses
And in with the ruling, cultured classes—
The whiter one's hands and the less one labors,
The more he is thought of by all his neighbors.
Even with workers 'tis so.

Hence, hard is the task
Of those who insist that all are brothers
And live by their faith, to emancipate others.
The rich raise the cry of "Dangerous teachers!"
The middle class fly from radical preachers,
The proletaire, blinded, are pitiful creatures,
With spirit and courage blurred out of their features;
And fear makes a desperate task.

GEORGE HOWARD GIBSON.

*From a volume of verse entitled *"The People's Hour,"* to come from the press simultaneously with this book. By the same publishers.

THE MILLS OF MAMMON

CHAPTER I.

ONE SIDE OF A GRAVE QUESTION.

On one of the most aristocratic avenues in our metropolis stands a mansion, unsurpassed in beauty of architecture by any within the reach of the eye in either direction.

Within, the appointments are in keeping, and the best of our society of the "new rich" had been entertained within its doors, up to six months ago. But death felt its way even into this abode of wealth, and took the wife and mother from scenes of earthly contests and conquests, leaving the Honorable Horace Holdon a widower, with a daughter twenty-one years of age, and a son of twenty-five.

Beatrice Holdon had tried to make up to her mother for the neglect and indifference of her brother Joel, and her love and devotion had, in some measure, compensated for his shortcomings.

As Joel Holdon plunged more and more into the vortex of vice that opens inviting arms to the sons of rich and indulgent parents, his mother sought to drown her grief and quiet her conscience by redoubling her charitable work among the poor. Beatrice went into "the sweet work of charity" with a double purpose—to satisfy her mother's longing for forgetfulness, and to satisfy her desire to do all she might to help lift the weight of misery she had early come to know in the lives of the distressed about her.

"Bee" Holdon was sincere, honest, earnest and devoutly religious. She had learned to differentiate between poverty and pauperism—a thing seemingly impossible of comprehension on the part of the average charity worker. Her work among the poor carried a blessing with it, because of the spirit in which she gave.

After her mother's death, this girl of twenty-one practically gave her time and all the money she could coax from her father to the work.

The mother died firm in the faith that her husband was a true man, even though a bit hard to understand at times.

Could she have known the real Horace Holdon, could she have known that some of the dens of vice, gilded though they were, upon which she would have looked with loathing, furnished each month a percentage of the money she spent to assist the wives and children of men who had been ground to powder by the system that paid toll to her husband, she could not have been a charity worker, and would have had more of heartache and sorrow to endure.

Joel had just returned from a trip to the Pacific coast which had cost his father something like ten thousand dollars, a trip in which a "foot-light favorite" figured. While Joel is smarting from the sting of things the Honorable Horace had said in warning, among others, that he must live within his allowance until he should decide to settle down, that this San Francisco escapade is the last he will settle for, etc., we will introduce him. An offer from the father to get him a berth with the mining branch of the trust, Joel had simply scoffed at, declaring that when he wanted to be buried alive he would let the governor know.

Twice since his return home, Bee had induced him to accompany her on her trips into the realm of poverty—and that was the limit. Joel swore under his breath at each halt. The sight of the squalid misery of the poor sickened him. He looked upon all of the, to him, wretched mass as so many beggars, and resented the familiarity of his sister with such people.

After the second expedition he determined to "blow her up," as he put it, and if she wouldn't listen to reason, he proposed to take the matter to the governor. His chance came sooner than he had expected. While taking a rather absent-minded look at his many manly perfections of figure and feature in the hall mirror, Bee caught sight of him and prevented his escape by a sudden descent upon him. "Oh, Joel," she exclaimed, "I want you to go with me this morning—this June weather

is lovely." Scowling into the mirror, until his face suited his fancy, Joel turned. "Where to, Sis? Not to hand out another batch of Dad's dough to the brats down on Hell's half-acre." Bee put up her hands in protest. "How can you, Joel? You, you ought not to talk so!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "See here, Sis, I might just as well unload now as any other time, and I tell you flat, if you won't listen to me, I am going to appeal the case to the governor."

"I don't understand—what case?" Bee inquired.

"What case? Say, kid, don't try to string me. You know what I am driving at—this damned charity nonsense of yours—that's what case."

Bee dropped her hand from her brother's arm, and her eyes rested upon the tips of his shoes, her lips trembling, she protested: "Joel, you shouldn't talk to me that way—that's the way drunken husbands talk to the wives they abuse."

"Put me on a level with the drunken husband of one of those dirty, sniveling beggars, who coax money out of you, and then laugh at you for being a "softy" as soon as your back is turned! Well, I call that the limit."

"Oh, Joel, you know I didn't mean that. You could not abuse the confidence of a woman who trusted you—you couldn't sink so low as to abuse your wife. I only meant that your voice and your sneering sounded strangely like things I've heard in my work among the poor."

Joel patted her on the shoulder. "All right, Sis, let it go at that, but just the same I want to straighten you out on what you call your 'work among the poor.'"

"Well?" Bee looked up at him appealingly.

"Well," petulantly. "What do you mean by that 'well?' Do you know, sometimes I'd like to slap you when you look at me that way. There's something in your eyes I don't like—sort of a 'villain still pursued her look.'"

"Joel!"

"Fact, Sis! Anyhow it don't work a spell on me this time. You know," he plunged on, "I have always been

strictly against your meddling with those beggars, and if the old woman——"

"What old woman, Joel?" Bee's voice was low, but vibrant with reserve force.

"Hang it! Mother, of course! If she hadn't gone nutty on charity work——" The girl swung about, and catching him by the shoulders, shook him, saying: "Stop right there, Joel Holdon. You may say anything you please of me, but don't you dare to say one word about mother. You, of all men, to belittle the work that she gave herself up to, when you—when you——"

Joel removed her shaking hands from his shoulders, and in an injured tone, said: "So you are going to take up the hectoring where she left off. God, I know now what I've always seen in your eyes! Come, kid, spit it out, spit it out, I'm used to it."

Bee shrank away from him, and for a moment was silent; then lifting her eyes, and holding out her hands to him, said: "Joel, forgive me. I promised mother I would never reproach you, but you drove me——"

"Never reproach me—and I drove you? Say, Sis, this is as good as a play. What have I done? It seems to me the reproach is on the other side. You belong to the best set in town, and everywhere I go, and everybody I know, who is anybody, either says you are queer or thinks so. What with your hiding yourself, and associating with people who are simply impossible—why, damn it, Bee, you know as well as I do that the whole of our set is down on the sort of work you are doing. It's bad enough for us to pay over money to some charity organization—and that's blackmail nine times out of ten; but to have you going into the homes of such people as you dragged me to twice last week, and you holding their miserable, dirty babies in your arms, while great big, red-faced women weep tears on your silk cape—each one of 'em worth a hard dollar to her, and the whole tribe of brats, schooled to it, no doubt, stood around, or pulled at you, and told the lies made up for them. Why, Bee, it's disgraceful! It's an outrage, and I don't see what the governor's been thinking about that he hasn't put a stop to it, since he has a free hand with you."

Bee did not reply. Standing with downcast eyes, she

seemed to be pondering the weight of her brother's criticism of her "great labor."

Believing her silence argued conviction, Joel with vigor renewed the attack, while his father arrived at the library door and halted within earshot, as he resumed: "You see, it's like this, Sis. The half they tell you is false; there isn't anything to it. Those women whose tales of woe you unfolded to me after we got away from their dirty dens are drunkards along with their husbands in nine cases out of ten. Yes, they are, and those who are not are in poverty because their husbands belong to labor unions, and are striking, or are in jail instead of being at work. The thing I'm kicking about is this—I've been in this world twenty-five years, and I've seen a lot of it, and I tell you the more 'sweet charity' you pour out on the wives and children of the workers, the more the men organize and strike, and destroy our property. Why, kid, it's a regular layout—a game. The governor runs a big factory, the men want more money for booze and craps and penny ante. They organize a labor union, and hit the old man for a raise. If he don't come down with the rocks, they strike, and cave in windows and raise general hell all around the works. At the same time the governor's daughter, a bit loose in her headpiece, is a snoopin' around amongst these men's wives and ladling out the governor's rocks promiscuously to any one who can break the drouth, and while dad fights the men, he puts up the dough to feed their families."

"Joel, Joel, you don't know, you can't know what you are saying." Bee, with hands clasped, stood before him, when the father called out: "Come Joel, and you, too, Bee; come into the library and let us settle this matter—the three of us." Joel was elated; this was better than he had hoped. Now Bee would surely get "hers," he thought, as he entered the library and threw himself into one of its comfortable chairs. Bee entered quietly, and sat down where she could see both men. She had always known that her father opposed this work of hers; now she felt that all her hopes and fears were to find issue, but she was undismayed. In her quiet blue eyes there dwelt the steadfast light of purpose; she thought she knew her way through life—they did not. Her thoughts were undisturbed for quite a while. The

father was evidently at a loss how to open the subject. Finally Joel severed the knot.

"I don't know how much you heard of what I was saying to Sis," he observed, "but I can state my case in a few words. I am dead against Bee's going any farther with this foolishness she calls 'charity work.' I want to see her put in a little more ginger, and not make a holy show of herself, going around looking like a picture of 'Mary at the Cross.'"

Bee sprang from her chair. "Joel, Joel, how can you?"

"Beatrice is right, Jo, let's hear facts—your oratory is a bit lurid," the father remonstrated.

"Well, it's the truth; the girls she ought to run with make fun of her, and the fellows of our set, outside of Phelps, Harmon and Wetherby, call her a 'Little Puritan.' Why, a man would be better off without a sister than to have one who don't know enough to take the pole in the race when it is hers all the way round."

"Well, well, yes. But, Jo, I must insist that your language is better fitted to the race track than to the company of either your sister or father."

"I beg pardon." Joel uttered the words perfunctorily and settled back to the cushions, well satisfied.

Across the room Bee was wondering at the difference in her brother's viewpoint touching her and himself. For her he insisted that she should take the pole for the family honor, for himself forbidden pastures, and a sulking fit, if harness or training for a race in defense of family honor were even mentioned.

"Well, Beatrice," the father turned to her with a smile, "what have you to say to Joel's demand that you give up this plaything?"

"May I hear what you have to say first, father?"

"Why, certainly, Bee. While I am willing to admit that I am not nearly so radical as Joel—and mind, I am convinced that he has had, as he says, a good deal of opportunity to learn at first hand, since he has had to sow a big crop of wild oats, and spread the sowing to the two coasts—I must admit that I don't believe in the sort of 'charity work' you indulge in. You see, it is this way, Beatrice. There are a hundred and one organized charities, church associations and begging institutions that

make a regular business of charity. Why, there isn't a business man, a club or any other institution, even a saloon, that isn't hounded to death by the agents of these so-called charities. In fact, it has come to be a bore, and I have been satisfied for a long time that the majority of these organizations which prey on business men and rich families are more interested in charity because it gives them an easy living than on any other account. Still, so long as they are organized, and we have to pay the fiddler, I don't see why our wives and daughters should take up such work. And you know, Beatrice, they are always opposing the meddling of—well, people who go out individually and interfere with their work."

"But I don't interfere, father. The people I help would not accept help from the agents of organized charities, and they do need help so badly. Their lives are wretched. Oh, I wish you men could see them as I do."

Beatrice stood at the head of the great library table, her face aglow.

"Father—Joel—don't try to take this work away from me. I would hate myself and this beautiful home and all our wealth if I had to sit down with folded hands, knowing what I do of the distress that burdens the lives of thousands of innocent women and children, yes, and men. Don't ask me to give this up. I——"

"Nonsense, kid," Joel protested, with a fine assumption of superior wisdom, "you just pack your duds and go to the shore with any one of a dozen parties who would be only too glad to have dad's daughter to flaunt in the faces of their dearest friends, and I'll bet the price of your outfit you'll forget all the little brats and the tear-dripping dames and their drunken husbands inside of a month."

"Joel is right, Beatrice," the father's level voice came to her as from afar. "You need a change. You have been too much alone since mother's death, and besides, can't you see that your own statement must condemn your work, as you call it ? If the people you carry my money to are too good to go to the charitable associations, or accept help from their agents, they don't deserve help, and each one you go to is just adding another to the army of paupers."

"They are not paupers," Bee's voice was full of insistence.

"Not paupers?" Joel sneered.

"Then what are they?" the father demanded.

"I wish I could take you into their homes," Bee began, when Joel interrupted with—"Well, haven't you? Didn't I see the dirty, ragged little beasts in swarms? Didn't you show me the choicest lot of bedraggled women in town, and didn't we see hundreds of their daughters coming out of old Hutch's factories, looking like the very devil? What do you think you can do with such cattle, anyway? Not paupers, indeed! Next you will try to tell us that they are as good as yourself, or some such rot."

He turned to his father. "I tell you, dad, it's just such foolishness as this of mother's and Bee's that's got these working people to talking Socialism, and yelling for a divvy. Why, I stopped on a corner the other night and heard a big, hulking working man tell a crowd of Nixon's men that if it wasn't for the fact that they had to work hard enough to keep two automobiles, a carriage, a trap, a big mansion and all the men and women the Nixons have to serve them, they would have more of the comforts of life in their own homes. Then the impudent cuss pointed over to the plant and said: 'Men, you may organize unions and strikes from now on till doomsday, but so long as Nixon and his class own that plant and its machinery, and all the wealth you produce, you working men will remain within six weeks of the poorhouse, and when a panic comes you'll either send your family to the poorhouse or accept the charity monger's dole of stolen gold, red with the blood of little children.' And at that the mob shouted. Say, I wanted to make a roughhouse right there. The idea!"

"Who was he?" Bee asked in a low voice.

"Oh, I can tell you all right, all right. I found out, and the next day I fixed his clock."

"How was that?" the father questioned.

"Why, easy enough. It seems that our beastly city government is afraid of that scum, and to curry favor with them they issue street permits for their speakers. I went to the policeman and got this lout's name and found out that he worked for the Nixon people, and when I

went down town the next day I sent my card up to Nixon, and when I told him what downright anarchy Bulman had been feeding the men, why, he just reached over and tapped the bell and had his nibs up on the carpet in less than no time. Say, he looked like a stoker when he came in, dirty, greasy, and wet with sweat. Then Nixon lit into him. He looked sort of queer at first, but when Nixon got through with him, I'll be damned—excuse me. I'll be blowed if he wasn't smiling. I'll admit he kept his temper while Nixon jacked him up, and at last he just turned to Nixon and said: 'From what you have said, I infer that you don't require my services any longer.' Nixon told him to go back and finish his day, but the fellow said, 'No, there is some danger that I might convert some of the men to Socialism. No, I quit here and now. My political convictions are not for sale, even at the price of bread.' And he stood his ground until he got the paltry wages due him. And then, think of Nixon's gratitude to me. Bulman had hardly gone when Nixon turned on me and said: 'I'm sorry you came, Holdon. That man was one of the most faithful workers we ever had, and besides, he's in a devil of a hard row—lost two children last year, and this year his boy, who was just getting old enough to help out, got cut up in a machine over on the west side, and isn't well yet. If I'd thought he had the nerve to take the gaff that way, I wouldn't have sent for him.' And he seemed put out. Now, wasn't that the limit?"

With tears in her eyes, and her cheeks red with a righteous anger, Bee confronted her brother. "I'm glad, so glad you refused to go with me this morning. I was going to his home to carry comfort to his sick wife, and that poor boy, crippled for life. And you, my own brother, have taken the last hope away from them! I am glad, Joel Holdon, that you would not go. If Mr. Bulman had seen you——" She hesitated. "Do you know what I would do to you if I were in Mr. Bulman's place? Well, I'd fight you. I'd whip you if I went to jail for it."

"My God, Beatrice, what are you talking about?" Holdon looked at his daughter with staring eyes.

"Just what I mean, father. It was such a contemptible thing to do. I know Mr. Bulman is a Socialist, but

isn't that just as honorable as being a Democrat or a Republican? Don't we pride ourselves on having a free country, where each man holds to whatever politics he pleases?"

"But, Beatrice, you don't understand. While I will admit that the constitution grants that right, I contend that Socialism does not come under that head. Why, child, we have got to weed them out of our shops and factories. They won't be put down and they are a real danger."

"But, father, if you had a Socialist in the foundry and his family would suffer if you discharged him, and some one came to you as Joel went to Mr. Nixon, and you sent for the man and he refused to give up what he believed, or refused to lie to you to hold his place, would you discharge him?"

"I certainly should. Why, Beatrice, I am not running a charity organization. When I have paid a man his wages, he has no farther claim upon me. Of course, I would discharge him as a lesson to the rest of the men not to fool away their time listening to such rant."

"Then the men in your foundry do not have political liberty?" It was a statement rather than a question.

"Political liberty be blowed! I'm talking business. If you understood business, there would be less cobwebs in your head, my girl. Business demands that the workers be kept where they cannot disturb our markets by strikes and boycotts. And when it comes to Socialist politics, that is ten times worse than all the unions in existence. When we give the men work, they ought to show enough gratitude to knock any agitator on the head who comes around talking about our mansions, carriages, automobiles and wealth. Instead of that, as Joel says, they throw up their hats and shout, and then go home, and likely dream of the day when they will be riding in automobiles. I'd like to see them."

"That's just it, dad, and Sis is feeding Socialists and other cattle with our money, trying to fatten them up so they can fight. I'll tell you flat, if I held the combination to the cash box she'd not get another piece of money for any such foolishness. Better pack her off to the coast next week, and let her cool her heels in the surf."

"But I'm not going," Bee announced.

"Well," her father replied, "you can understand that you don't get another cent of my money to put into the pockets of your suffering poor. You'll get just your monthly allowance, and that's all. If you don't go to some summer resort, what do you intend to do? I don't think I shall keep this great house open——"

Beatrice put a hand upon his shoulder, and said: "You promised mother," her voice was almost a whisper, "that this should be my home as long as I lived." His head fell, and even Joel's ever-drumming fingers halted.

"Well, well, yes, I did; but if you don't go to the seaside, you might go somewhere else, you know. You wouldn't lose your home."

The girl stooped and kissed him.

"I'm going to stay at home, father."

She walked to the door, her lips trembling and her eyes filled with tears, then hesitated and turned back.

"Did you really mean that I am not to have any more money for—for sweet charity?" she faltered.

"Yes, I meant it." Holdon's voice was anything but steady, and Beatrice felt that he would yield if she but insisted.

"But I can still be honest with myself," she said, proudly, and went on: "I have promises to fulfill to-day," looking straight across the table at Joel, "and a duty that wrings my heart. I'm going to Mr. Bulman's and tell them the whole truth. I consider Joel's act a most contemptible thing, whether measured by business or any other standard, and I shall not hide the truth, even for my own brother."

Without a thought as to what her words really implied, the Honorable Horace Holdon sprang from his chair, exclaiming: "And I forbid you to do anything of the kind."

"Here, too," Joel added.

For just a moment the girl hesitated. Her eyes had lost their softness and her lips were drawn straight across her even teeth.

"Yet, I will go," she declared. And added while they stood, scarce believing their senses: "Not that I want to be disobedient, but I gave a promise to one who knew my heart, and appreciated my work. A promise I dare not break. I must be honest with myself and to those

who trust in me." She left the room, sobbing as she went.

"That comes of mother's tomfoolery. I always thought Sis was——"

"Hush, Joel. Beatrice is all right. She's a little jewel, but it's this confounded mixing with the poor that has sent her off on a tangent. The little I give her for charity won't build up many unions, or feed enough Socialists to carry a ward. I'll bring her smiles back tomorrow, with a nice check. See if I don't, and after all your butting in on the Bulman business, and making a big thing of it——"

"Well, how in the dickens could I know anything about her being as thick as soubrettes in flytime with the outfit? If I had——"

"Well, yes, if you had, of course, you wouldn't have said it. But the thing I'm thinking of is Beatrice herself. If some eligible young fellow could be gotten to take up some of her time. Of course, I don't want any rakes or young Johnnies coming around, but some young man of good family and plenty of means."

"Why, dad, what's the matter with Charlie Wetherby? He's the limit of all that's nice, and his folks are such an old family that the girls shrivel up at seventeen, and the boys go in for psalm singing and all sorts of devotional exercises at ten. He's the very fellow; besides, he's dead crazy over 'charity' and has his old man eternally digging up for associations for suppressing everything but the old man's sugar mills. He would soon show her where charity of her kind was a sin, and if she would take to him—well, he won't have less than two millions."

"Bring him out and let's see how Beatrice takes to his sort of charity. And, Joel, we have both been trying to show Beatrice the path of duty. Now, how about yourself? Have you thought much about my proposition to put you up at the iron mines?"

Joel looked at his watch. "Phew, past time now. No, I haven't thought it out yet. I've got an engagement at the 'Eagle,' and I'll be twenty minutes late. No, I haven't thought much about it. Good day."

As Joel left the room, the father called after him. "Well, think it over, Joe."

CHAPTER II.

"HUMP'S" DAUGHTER.

In a section of Illinois where farm lands sold, not so many years ago, for less per acre than the price of a good pair of boots, the growing demand for the soil has made many a first settler comparatively well-to-do. Such an one was Zedekiah Holcomb, only son of a quiet old Vermonter who had been well satisfied to have a bare three-hundred-and-twenty of our rich soil, after having spent the best half of his life on a much smaller and less productive farm in the Green Mountain state.

"Jed," an only child, inherited the fat farm shortly after his marriage with Martha Plummer, the buxom daughter of "th' most bullheadedest neighbor God ever let a Christian settle next to on this earth," to use Jed's father's flat-footed declaration as a basis of character study.

Herman Plummer (known to his little world as "Hump") had, to hear him tell it, been a wild blade in his time—did pretty much everything his worst enemy could possibly have accused him of doing, murder excepted. But all that happened before he gave his heart to God. To hear "Old Hump" testify served the youth of the community in lieu of the circus. There were, we are sorry to say, some grown folk, and amongst them a few mothers, who condoned this levity in the young. And it must be recorded in their defense that there were extenuating circumstances.

When Plummer warmed up year after year in the old-fashioned revivals, got going at quarterly meeting, or, as always happened, found the full power of grace at camp-meeting, his crimes of commission grew in number and atrocity as he grew in years and in grace.

Martha, the only child in the Plummer home, had been early offended at the levity of the youngsters of the

community, and had had a number of quarrels over her father's sinnings, his conversion and his sanctification before she gave her name to the church.

Hump's wife belonged to the congregation, as a matter of course; but the only testimony she was ever known to offer was delivered in a quavering voice, and always in the same words—"Brothers and sisters, pray for me."

Even some of the church members admitted that she needed praying for—though it is doubtful if they ever followed up the admission with a supplication. Not because of her sins did she need praying for; bless you, no. She was so far from sinning that "She didn't know she had a soul of her own," Sister Grimes declared; Sister Smilley added: "An' if she knew she had one she wouldn't dast t' say it when Hump an' Martha could hear her, or they'd hev it outen her."

The happiest day in Herman Plummer's life was that on which Martha gave her first "testimony" touching the wonderful power it had taken from the fountain-head of all-power to hold her back from the temptations and snares set for her feet. In her father's estimation, the splendor of Martha's public professions centered in the sharp darts she threw amongst the youngsters who on every occasion pushed their levity as far as their parents would permit—and sometimes they forgot the line, to find the rod at a later hour.

This religion of wrath, with the full flames of hell playing ever before the eyes of those who didn't care to get what Hump had, suited some of the congregation, while others grew restless while forced to nose its fumes. Certain preachers and elders began to avoid the Plummer home. As the church stood on Plummer ground, this almost open avoidance of the most religious man in the neighborhood served to further divide the church. In the end the community had two churches. This division only intensified the labor of Herman Plummer to uproot the infidels who believed a Catholic could go to heaven, or that any place this side of the literal hell was hot enough for such folks as Universalists, Unitarians and other liberal faiths. And he proved his case, by an appeal to the book of books.

Martha's religious armor was fitted to her for life on the day that silly, little Jane Young told her "No young

people ever go to your old church any more, 'less it's to hear your father belch hell-fire and make a fool of hisself generally."

From that day on Martha became a close disciple of her father, and bent every energy to the task of making religion a thing for sane folk to shudder at. Several years after her father's death, Martha chancing to hear a wandering Baptist preaching the same pure and undefiled damnation her father believed in, decided forthwith that the Baptist church should henceforth have her support. We have all heard the old saw: "One swallow does not make a summer," so, too, Martha later discovered that one preacher does not make a ministry—in the Baptist faith.

How it came about that fun-loving "Jed" Holcomb ever turned his eyes toward Martha Plummer, you will have to guess. It is recorded in his book of life that he rode over to the Plummer home one Sunday afternoon and never rode, drove, or walked anywhere else any Sunday after that until he had married Martha. It is also recorded, in that selfsame book of life, that she snatched him as a brand from the burning; that for a year before marriage, and ten long years thereafter, he listened to "Old Hump's" exhortations, confessions, and expostulations—then the good Lord took pity on him and took "Hump" home to glory, or disposed of him in some other fashion. It is also recorded that Mrs. Plummer and "Jed" seemed to "git along amazin' well when they was alone together," which leads us to hope that "Jed's" sacrifice was not entirely lost to the world.

CHAPTER III.

A WORKER'S HOME.

In a town of fifteen hundred inhabitants, located in central Illinois, back from the public square but three short blocks, stands a modest cottage. Behind we catch a glimpse of garden that reminds us strongly of a garden in which we labored happily when a boy. Within this modest cottage, the home of William Harris, all is neat and sweet and clean. No works of art adorn the walls; unless the "premium chromos," of a decade ago, are works of art. No carpets with a velvet nap that deadens footfalls, as does old earth's great carpet of green, are on these floors; plain rag and ingrain suffice. Nor did the furniture that fills these six rooms, when new, cost one half as much as the massive dining table the Hon. Horace Holden imported from the palace of a wornout prince of France—no, the transportation charges on that Holdon table cost more. But there is something within these wooden walls that challenges the world's attention, now as never before. True worth abides beneath this roof; the homely virtues of the common life find lodgment here, and righteousness and love have here a home. When the world needs men, strong men, she comes to such homes as this, and in her hands, a-tremble with the dread of vice and crime left festering on her seats of power, she bears the chaplet of laurel—her gift in time of need to the sons of sweet, and simple-hearted mothers.

It mattered not what trouble entered a home in this little city, the first cry of those in distress was for the ministering hands, the sweet presence, of Mary Harris; a mother of labor; a helpmeet of man; an upbearer of the church of Christ.

With all the cares a normal soul finds to grow upon, Mary Harris put on new beauties as days were added to her life. At twenty, when William Harris won her, she

was still unformed in mind. When they were married and he had chosen to labor in the foundry in this town, his wife found her place in life. Having joined a church, it was her good fortune to sit under the ministry (as our mothers were wont to put it) of a man whose whole religion was one of works; whose heart found room to plead the cause of all mankind. His sermons dealt with the ever-pressing problems of the common life, and to drive home his teachings he insisted that Christ's parables were living things, dealing with literal truths. He refused to look upon God as an avenger. He pleaded for the regeneration of the whole man, refusing to accept lip service, or to countenance a "profession" that did not bring forth fruit meet for repentance. To him life, the years that fly, were all in all. The man, to merit the salvation he proclaimed, must needs be a man. The pocket-kodak Christianity of self-seekers, who mask their batteries of greed behind a symbol of the ultimate, the supreme sacrifice, was denounced in words that burned. Creeds to this minister were but yokes in which cattle might be driven to pull the car of a greedy ecclesiasticism. The dogmas of theologians, in this man's mind, served but to weaken the beautiful truths of the plain gospel of love. He deprecated—nay he condemned—the ostentatious organization of banded charitable institutions, holding that if "religion is to do good," and the majority of the people are religious, the need for charity will constantly grow less as religion manifests its power before man. In dealing with the young his stand was just as pronounced.

A new member came into his congregation, by letter, and brought with her all the "thou shalt not's" of a distant church. Questioning the attitude of the church toward the gaieties of the younger members she had gone to this man, and he had agreed to preach upon "The Children We Love."

This sermon will go with Mary Harris, and a few other hearers, through all the vicissitudes of life, and as they close their eyes in death "The Children We Love" will still be with them.

"Brothers and sisters," the minister said as he stood before his congregation, "I have promised to preach to you tonight upon a theme as old as motherhood—a theme that, in its beauty and solemnity, causes me to hesitate

as I seek words with which to clothe it—The Children We Love. How many of us love our children? How many of us have measured the depths of love? How many of us meet the duties, the sacrifices love demands?

"Love is a sublime force, that is and yet is not akin to passion. A supreme sacrifice, offering its all upon a burning altar and asking not anything in return. A glorious, voluptuous, well-filled presence that may feed upon a barren desert and still outlive, outshine, outserve selfishness enthroned in a fat land. Who would measure love with a tape, set its boundaries upon earth, or name its limitations beyond the portals of death?

"Love is all, and in all. Love is charity, and passion, and hope, and faith, and seeking, and sacrifice, all in one great crucible tried by the fire of life. What is the measure of our loving?

" 'The Children We Love'—Is the child that comes to your home regretted, a child of love? Does love prompt suspicion? Does suspicion beget charity?

"All the religion you have within your heart tonight is pure love, and if love requited, is joy, complete joy; then you who profess religion should look upon the children we love with all charity, all hope and trust.

"Let my people dance before me, saith the Lord of hosts, for today is the day of deliverance. When we enter the presence of our souls if there is in our hearts either hatred, anger or malice against one of these little ones then our prayers shall defile us.

"Childhood is the springtime of life, when its rarest blossoms come to light. The very garden of God centers in the groups of merry children who congregate to learn the first great lesson of the passion of Calvary—to learn how to live, to love, to labor, and to wait the passing of the flower of youth into the full ripe fruitage of manhood and womanhood.

"You who think that love must rule with a rod of iron, beware! You who expect other manifestation of religion in youth than the religion of living up the days when honey drips from every opening flower, and laughter, free as the clouds that cross our skies, fills up the merry measure of the day, are treading upon dangerous ground. Bring me the child who has confessed Christ and taken upon its shoulders the weight of the

world's growing load of sin, and you bring to me a flower plucked from God's garden to be transplanted to live or die within a flower pot of your choosing.

"Are there wolves about that you seek to herd the children you love within the portals of the church? Yea, yea, there are wolves who rend the flesh of children, wolves who feed upon the sweet blood of our young daughters, wolves who poison the springs from which our youth drink—wolves!

"What are you doing my brother, my sister, to exterminate the wolves who live in your midst and feed upon those we love? To rob childhood of its freedom, its song of heaven-born melody, to fence it in behind a wall of 'don'ts,' to invest it with the name of Christian, to organize it into leagues or bands in the hope to sustain its virtue and ripen its honor, is but to admit the greater failure.

"My religion, your religion, is in the balance today. Either the sword of faith shall prevail against the wolves I see prowling in a Christian land, and these children of ours shall come into their inheritance, or this church, this religion, will go down to ruin when the wolves wax strong enough to dispute your right to protect the children you love even within the walls of your home. What are the rights of the child? What is this inheritance of which I speak? Listen—here is all of my religion, all of my politics, all of my philosophy of life:

"The child by right of birth shall have, to the full of its need, of all the wealth accumulated by the labor of those who have struggled for mastery over the material world, and of all the knowledge man has gathered in the struggle of the races—and this child—all children—shall have all of these things upon which to build their lives, without money and without price. To deny this right of the children to participate, to the fullest extent of their individual needs, in all things of worth stored upon this earth of ours today, on account of birth, parentage or racial extraction, is to deny the very existence of the Christ ethic.

"If you believe the wolves who fatten upon the heritage of our children are sapping the very foundations of the social order—then exterminate them and the religion

of our youth will be symbolical of purity, in ages yet unborn.

"You who lift your hands against the children who disobey your imperfect laws—take thought. Your obedience to laws your added years have given you opportunity to understand, is but halting; what right have you to strike? You, who are yet ignorant of many things, who meet punishment for violating laws of nature, of which you have been willfully ignorant, through long years—look at this child.

"A stranger, in a strange world, given over to wonder and by nature made inquisitive. He has to learn, and you who are responsible for the coming of this child; in your blindness lie to him, evade his questions, and build lie upon lie for your undoing. Mark you, a normal child of four is keener of intellect, more retentive of memory, more persistent in seeking knowledge, more able to judge man's true worth, than the majority of you of older growth. And still you think to deceive him. What right have you to demand more from the child than you are willing to give? He will give you measure for measure—a lie for a lie. He will show cunning to meet your craft. He will watch your dealings with others, if you are false to them you will have no right to weep over the loss of your children's respect, and condemn them as ungrateful. You have lost their respect because they know more of your hollowness, your hypocrisy, than the rest of the world knows—that is all.

"Fear not, if you are fully worthy of love you shall not be denied. Parentage is life's supreme test; to be worthy of motherhood, all of heaven has nothing more to offer the woman."

This man ministered and died long years before his philosophy of life became a vital issue in the land. They buried him and went away sorrowing. Another came, fresh from the school room and filled with a religion drawn from books. Mary Harris listened to him for full six months; then quietly withdrew from the church, and gave her life to good works.

But here come two of her loved ones. William, bent with labor and the weight of years, still bears the look of one who lives in a pleasant place. Charles, the youngest son, now working by his father's side in the foundry, is

first to reach the kitchen door where the mother stands beaming with pride in this, her baby.

Four children have gone out into the world from this home, and it is such as they who fight the world's battles. The moral strength society needs to guide her as she walks in the path wherein greed has digged pitfalls is nurtured in such homes as this.

"Hello, mother mine!" Charley's voice comes floating to her when he is but skirting the far side of the lot. For answer she waved her hand and waited.

"News, mother—Winslows want me after all, and I told Webb tonight that I would not be back in——"

"And my baby is going to leave me?" She reached blindly to the door for support, but before her hands could find this cold support her baby boy had taken her in his great, strong arms.

"There, there, mother, it isn't so awful bad, is it dear? —not like going so far I couldn't come back, you know." With terms of endearment the boy tried to soothe her, but still she clung to him sobbing out her fears of the great world beyond. The father, coming up, stood helpless in this mother's crisis. Did he see back, back beyond the birth of this strong-limbed young toiler, into the heart of a mother awaiting the agony? As he stands with misty eyes, is he following this sweet mother's patient, loving, ever-leading care of her babes?? Does he understand what she suffers—a mother's complete surrender to the demands of a generation with its own homes to build, its own battles to fight, with the fragments of wealth and opportunity still left to it?

"I know we talked it all over, Charles—but it was not like knowing the day. I didn't think I would be such a goose." The mother dried her eyes and tried to laugh. "Yes, of course you must go. I wouldn't think of keeping you."

"Mother, I knew you wouldn't be anything but just the bravest and best mother ever." The boy did not look back; his eyes were on the future, and he told himself a hundred times during that afternoon that the great world of men was hungry to do him honor. Listen to him: "You want me to make that great machine of mine a success, don't you mother? And I will, I can promise

you that. And mother, when I am rich I'll show you and father the whole world. Besides, if I am to make a place for myself in the world, I must get away from this dead-alive town."

"Yes, dear," she had replied, looking into his splendid eyes of brown, all alive with youth's first great resolve; "your place is where a good man may make the best use of all God has given him. Father and I will begin a new life next week—but it will be hard, oh, so hard."

CHAPTER IV.

SPIES WANTED!

Behind barred gates and solid walls of brick and stone, an army of men and boys are laboring for the three mean things upon which man depends for mere animal existence. Food, to replace the tissues worn to waste in yesterday's struggle; shelter, to protect the body from earth's elements; and clothing, that badge of higher being. But scant room is there for the multitude of other wants society imposes, to find satisfaction in the wage doled out to the workers. Yet the majority of those who enter here go singing, laughing, or jesting to their tasks. Only a few are serious without being sullen; and the danger that lurks behind the sullen faces, is alike a danger to the jester and the serious-minded toiler within the gates.

At the meeting of the streets these walls of brick and stone close upon an office building, the home of the Holdon Foundry Company. Within the sumptuous office the president of the company, the Hon. Horace Holdon, once member of congress, is in earnest conversation with his superintendent, Mr. Franklin Price, while the motley army of men and boys are filing in at the gates on either street.

"It's too much to pay for such protection," Mr. Holdon observes petulantly.

"Yes, it is steep. But when a man undertakes a job like that he is practically taking his life in his hands—and then I don't suppose this company is in the business just for it's health." The superintendent laughed.

"I don't care a cent about that, what I want to know is do you believe it would pay us to put up the five hundred dollars for membership?"

"I certainly do, or I wouldn't have bothered you with it a second time. You will admit that I am pretty close to the running end of the business, and, besides, I have

trusties among the men, who keep me posted; the only fault I find with them is that the men are getting to know them, and that ends their usefulness."

"Then you look for trouble?"

"Not this year, but trouble, yes. And I had thought this Cleveland scheme a good one to push. It's a good thing if it fails. It costs us but five hundred, and if it's organized, we will have the making and breaking of labor troubles in our own hands. I tell you, Mr. Holdon, the devil himself couldn't have hatched a better scheme to offset the growing power of the unions."

"Suppose we grant the utility of the scheme," said Holdon, taking up a letter, "there are still other considerations. What guarantee have we that this company, which bargains to furnish spies and sell the secrets of the unions, and make strikes to our order, may not in turn sell us out?"

"Every guarantee, a common interest, for one thing."

After a moment of silence the magnate looked up to say, "I see, so you look for trouble in the future, and like a wise man are planning to be forearmed. You believe the organization of this Corporations' Protective Association will serve our ends?"

"I do. In other plants the men are piling into the unions like sheep going over a fence, and you know what that means, within the year we will have committees in this office representing the men."

"What men?" the president demanded angrily.

"Oh, the moulders and machinists, the others will follow later."

"Why, man, they are the backbone of the works."

"Yes."

"We can't have trouble, Price." Holdon paused, thought better of it and asked, "Are you sure of this?"

"Positive."

"Well, well, well—say Price, if it ever comes to a show-down you give them just as little show as a snowball has in Tophet, and it'll suit me." He turned to the superintendent and concluded the interview by saying: "As you go out send Moses in, and remember, we must avoid trouble, our contracts are too valuable and we have little time margin on them. I suppose if the men knew this they'd hustle to shake the tree. Well, they won't get

many plums while Price is in the neighborhood without fighting for them," was Holdon's comment as the superintendent went out.

Moses Webster had been a stenographer at Holdon's for five years and had lately been transferred to the auditing department. When he entered the private office, the first call he had ever had to that sanctum of business acumen, his heart was troubled. A wife and two little tots depended upon him for their existence. A salary of sixteen dollars per week, eaten as fast as earned, gave him every right to dread the outcome of an interview that might entail enforced idleness, and that meant want from the first day, grim, staring want—unless he applied to his foster mother, and that, he told himself, he would never do, although she would gladly help him.

"Good morning, Mr. Webster, have a chair and a cigar. I want to have a confidential talk with you." The Hon. Horace Holton was at his best.

But who will wonder that Moses Webster was too nonplussed to articulate, much less sit down. For years he had seen stenographers, clerks, bookkeepers, office boys and day laborers, enter by the door he had just closed behind him and in a few brief minutes come forth, changed, having lost their jobs. For the time being they, like the drug fiend denied his dope, had lost their hold upon life. Yet here he was with a cigar in his shaking fingers.

"Take that arm-chair, Mr. Webster." As he renewed the invitation a smile of comprehension crossed the employer's full blooded lips,—and he hastened to reassure this citizen of ours.

"I just had a talk with Price,"—he lied like a gentleman with his next breath,—"and as a result of our conversation about you I have decided to raise your wages —we want to have our help satisfied, if that can be done within reason. Let's see; Price mentioned it, but it has slipped my memory, how much do you get now?" A smile that had done duty in many a close place helped his auditor to find his tongue.

"Sixteen dollars per week, Mr. Holdon, since Price put me in Smith's place."

"Yes, yes, and you have a family?"

"Yes sir, a wife and two little ones."

"Well, well; why bless me, don't you smoke?" For answer Moses lit his cigar, and the magnate went on, "I thought you did. You will find that a pretty good weed, and if we agree today you will always find the box open."

"Thank you," the wondering employe replied.

"Yes, yes. Well, let's get down to business. You see it's this way, Mr. Webster; I am away a great deal, and when I am here there's a mountain of work piled on my desk. Of course you can understand that a great deal of it is of such a character that I cannot allow it to go through the ordinary channels, it's—well, confidential, or personal, let us say. This being the case, I decided to offer you a position here in my office. I must have a man who is absolutely safe."

A pair of keen black eyes measured Moses as he answered: "Yes sir, I believe I follow you."

"I had thought, if you would consider this proposition, to offer you—what was it Price suggested? ? Let me see—well, I don't recall the figure. Now, what would you suggest?" And still that smile.

"Why, really, Mr. Holdon, I don't like to set a price, though I assure you I feel honored, and will do my very best to deserve your confidence."

"Well, well, it really doesn't matter what Price's figure was. I believe you will be worth twenty dollars per week to me—and if that is satisfactory I will put you to work right now—and give you a little surprise for the wife as well." Reaching into a pocket he extracted a roll and held out a bill. "You know the Bible parable of the Master of the vineyard and the men he hired? Some came in the morning, some at noon, and others at the eleventh hour, yet they all received the same pay. This is the eleventh hour of the week, we might say, and here's ten dollars to add to your wages."

Moses could but lamely stammer his gratitude as he pocketed the gift and sat down to the typewriter and took this letter, his first assignment of work on his new job with the Holdon Foundry Company, a part of a great system of concentrating units of industry:

Corporations' Protective Association,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Chicago, ——— 19——

Gentlemen—Through kindness of your Mr. James, we have had our attention called to your most excellent undertaking. You will find herewith a draft (No. 2792) Chicago Exchange, drawn to your order, for five hundred dollars ($500.00), same to cover cost of membership in your Association.

We understand that, in event of your perfecting the organization of the Protective with at least one hundred members, within one year from date of your prospectus, we are entitled to have the services of two of your men, from any trade specified, without additional cost to us, for a period of four weeks.

Please let us know at your earliest convenience at how early a date you could supply us with two men—machinist and moulder—union men and good workmen. We could use them to advantage at this time.

Trusting the draft inclosed will answer fully for our confidence, and hearty good wishes for the success of your much needed institution,

We are yours, etc.

As Holdon ceased dictating he leaned forward in his chair. "Just add another word, Mr. Webster. Tell them not to use our firm's name, and to send all communications in plain envelopes marked "personal" and addressed to me, here at the office."

When Moses had mailed the letter he took time to ask himself this question: "What can Holdon want with union men? has he had a change of heart?" This was the only fly in the ointment. So one laborer, at least, went forth from the office that evening dreaming as do those who lave their brains in the fumes of the seductive poppy.

CHAPTER V.

JOEL TAKES THE MONEY.

"Here, Beatrice, is a check for an even two-hundred," the Hon. Horace Holdon announced, drawing a slip of paper from his bill book, as Beatrice, Joel, and Mr. C. Augustus Wetherby entered the parlor, on the second day after that scene in the Holdon library, narrated a few chapters back.

Turning to Mr. Wetherby, Mr. Holdon explained: "My daughter is greatly interested in the poor, and while I am not in full sympathy with her work, at least with a part of it, she is so wrapped up in it that I have to humor her."

"I am sure," Mr. Wetherby replied, bowing to Beatrice, "whatever charity Miss Holdon honors with her preference is most highly honored. May I inquire what organizations you patronize, Miss Holdon?"

"None, I assure you," Beatrice smiled.

"But surely—I don't understand. Your father produces a check, and assures us you devote money freely to charity, and——"

"I am my own organization, begging committee, advisory board, local agent, secretary, treasurer, missionary, press agent and president," and added as she took a seat, "in the full capacity of all these several departments of my charity organization I desire to thank Mr. Holdon for his generous offer, and assure him I have no immediate need for funds, as I have called in some loans within the last two days and so have enough means to meet the immediate and pressing needs of the organization."

The Hon. Horace was vexed, but still held the check in his hand. Joel whistled, and looked hard at his spirited sister. The visitor showed his surprise as he said: "Well, that's a new one. I've been giving to all sorts of charities until the old man—my father, I mean

—has come to look upon my visits to his office as the visits of a charity solicitor. About all he asks me is, 'How much this time, Charles?' and if I start to tell him I am not looking for funds he seems really surprised. And would you believe it, when I do start in to tell him about a case he shuts me up before I can explain, saying: 'Don't spring any sick kids or broken bones, and I don't want to hear about some one who must be sent to some other climate, just name the amount and let me get it off my mind.' That's the way the old—father listens to my charity talks." He looked from one to the other with a vacant smile, then concluded: "And here I find a whole charity organization actually refusing money; I call that rich."

Holdon motioned to Beatrice to take the check, pushing it toward her over the polished table top, but the girl shook her head.

"If Bee don't want it," Joel observed, "and will indorse it, I can make use of it quite handily."

The father frowned, and Wetherby laughed. "Which shall it be Beatrice, Joel or charity?" the father bantered.

"It amounts to the same thing," the girl answered as she took the check, drew a tiny gold pen from her bosom and indorsed it with one sweep, then handed it to Joel.

Joel accepted the check, but he did have the grace to blush. The father sat with a deepening frown as he witnessed the little monetary transaction, but did not comment upon it audibly.

"What charitable organizations do you favor with your patronage?" the girl inquired of Wetherby to break an awkward silence that had fallen as Joel pocketed the check.

"Be careful, 'Chuck,' Sis is down on most of them, and believes in wading about in the filth herself—she's just trying to lead you into the shambles," Joel warned the guest.

"Don't believe you," Wetherby protested, "Miss Holdon may not like to feed fat paupers' agents, but I'll wager any legitimate charity will have her approval."

"Good for you, Mr. Wetherby," Beatrice clapped her hands, "good for you; now I am more anxious than ever to know what charities you support."

Wetherby hesitated, "Well, er—the list is a long one, Miss Holdon, and if you don't mind, I'll come out tomorrow and we can go over it together. I assure you if there is one on the list which you do not approve, I'll lop it off, and it won't get another cent."

Beatrice blushed, while Joel winked openly at his father.

"Really," she protested, "I have lots of work planned for tomorrow—two trips to people in the south end, and——"

"Oh, Miss Holdon, let me go with you. I've always given my money to other people to spend—I'd be delighted to see where they put it." Charles Augustus Wetherby was animated. Here was big game, and from the looks of things he was to have the help of the male members of the family in the hunt.

The girl looked him over keenly, questioning his earnestness. Finally she said with evident reluctance: "If you want to see where I put all the money I can find you may come at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning—now I must bid you good afternoon."

Beatrice had won her point, and consequently felt the more amiable, if that were possible. That check had been less of a temptation to her than might be supposed. She had been calling in loans since her father had said not another cent of his money should go to feed Socialists and the families of union men. When she had gone over her "loan ledger" as she called the account book in which she had been recording her little loans to people who would not take a gift, for three years past, she was surprised to find how much money she had loaned in that period of time. After careful inquiry she had gone to a number of those who had benefited by her liberality and told them her pressing need for funds with which to help others who were in need.

Beatrice left the library to go to John Bulman's. When she entered the crippled boy's room he looked up at her in such a questioning way that she knew he had been told what a mean part her brother had played in their life tragedy.

Bending over him she put her fingers on his lips. "Don't say a word to me, Robert—I know what they

have told you—it's true. and it has made me wretched, but you won't make me suffer for what I could not help, will you, Robert?"

The boy gently took her hand in his one well one and said: "Nothing they could ever say would make me believe you could do a mean thing."

"That's right, Robert," she was beaming, "have faith, nothing else matters. Faith is the sweetest flower in life's garden; many an ugly weed has developed beautiful blossoms just because the beautiful flower of faith cast its pollen upon the weed. Have faith, Robert, and who knows but that we shall be able to get you out into that garden before long."

John Bulman stood at the door looking at the beautiful woman as she bent over his crippled boy. A wave of pain crossed his face, only to be driven back that the old, old expression of dogged determination might take its wonted place.

Turning from the bed Beatrice saw him and her eyes fell, while hot blushes of shame chased across cheek and neck. She had often told herself that she felt like a child in need of answers to many things when she was near this man of the workaday world. Today she felt the guilt of her house full upon her.

"Good morning, Miss Holdon, a pleasant morning and the promise of a fine day," John was saying, as she looked up with trembling lips.

"Let's not talk about the weather," she pleaded. "I want to tell you—to tell you——"

"You want to tell me how badly you feel about that business at Nixon's," he assisted her; "come sit down and we'll have it all over in a minute."

"Now," said he as she was seated by the boy's bed, "I want to tell you that I have discovered that you are one of the bravest——"

"No, no, no," she protested, "I am a coward."

"Well, then," he smiled, "the bravest coward I ever knew. If you had been anything less than brave you would not have come to us after you knew your brother had made trouble for me at the Nixon plant."

"It was a mean, contemptibly mean thing to do," her eyes flashed, "and I told both Joel and father just what I thought of it."

John's eyes danced, "And did you now? I ought to beg your pardon for laughing, Miss Holdon, that I should," he declared stoutly, and laughed again. In reply to the girl's puzzled look, he said, "After all it's only a bit of the great game we are playing, and I've no fault to find either with Nixon or your brother."

"No fault to find?"

"None, Miss Holdon."

"Oh, you are only saying that because you want to make it easy for me to forget Joel's heartlessness. You can't meant it."

"But I do mean it. See here, Miss Holdon," he stood before her, "it's like this; over all the world two great forces are organizing for a mighty struggle. Capital to protect what it has, and strengthen its hold upon the productive agencies of the world; labor to take what it creates, and finally own the producing factors in the social state. I am of the labor force, and if I am intelligent enough to teach my fellow workers to demand that the machinery of production be turned over to them in order that they may have the wealth they create to use in their own homes, I certainly am dangerous to all who are capitalists, or depend upon capitalists to support them while they live off the labor of others. I knew when I decided to stand for the workers against the world that sooner or later I should have to make sacrifices to my faith. But Miss Holdon, I did not know how much would be demanded of me within a year." As John thought of his dead children, his crippled boy and sick wife, his voice broke, but thrusting emotion aside he took up the conversation. "I have faith, despite the many discouragements that come to one who fights for the poor and ignorant—faith, that beautiful flower you talked to Robert about; and Miss Holdon some of the weeds are already in bloom."

"But my father and brother?" Beatrice began.

"Don't say a word, not a word—as far as I know they play the game fair. If your father invited his men to organize unions, and told them Socialism was all right, if they thought so, he wouldn't last two years as a capitalist in his present business; and as far as your brother is concerned, he isn't a working man." The girl winced.

"No, I didn't mean to slur him. If he's clean and is playing the game on the square I haven't a word to say—it's got to be played out just this way——"

"You surely do not mean that he had a right to go to Mr. Nixon and complain——"

"Yes, I mean just that. He had the right to go to Nixon and protest against his keeping me on the work if he believed me to be a dangerous man. I had the same right to go to your father's men and tell them that the only thing they could do to end this war between capital and labor would be to own the capital, the machinery and the land, root and branch. I exercised that right, and your brother did the thing that seemed necessary to him in order to counteract my influence among the men."

"Your family, Mr. Bulman, all the families of the workers, are so poor—can you afford to sacrifice them in this war, as you call it?" Beatrice asked earnestly.

"I see no choice in the matter, Miss Holdon," he replied, then asked: "What would you call sacrificing them? Are they not sacrificed day by day? How many men and boys in your father's mills and foundry are killed or crippled each year? Are they not sacrificed? What becomes of their families? What becomes of the women and children of the workers' families? Look at my family—Robert crippled for life, my two girls working away their youth for a bare existence, and all this for bread alone. Are they not being sacrificed to the present industrial system, along with the millions who make up the army of labor? Girl, girl, you have worked faithfully amongst your father's poorest paid laborers for years, through good times and bad times; have you ever seen much difference in their lives? Have you not wondered time and again how they could bear to live as they are forced to year in and year out? Isn't there always more and more who need help? Isn't there always suffering and want? Have you ever thought where it would end??"

"I have only wondered," the girl answered slowly.

"I did the same for years," John admitted, smiling, "but now I know." The assertion was positive.

"You know?"

"Yes, listen: It will end when the flower of faith brings blossoms to a majority of the weeds in life's gar-

den, and that time depends upon how we cultivate the flower of faith—faith in one another, faith in the great future, faith in democracy, faith in manhood."

"How many years have you been working for what you call the co-operative commonwealth?" Beatrice inquired, as Bulman paused to hand Robert his medicine.

"Only a few years, Miss Holdon; had I known when I was a young man that I should have a part in this struggle I would not have married, for——"

"For shame, Mr. Bulman," the girl interrupted hotly, "to say that before Robert. Why, no one had a better right to marry than a sober, thrifty man like you."

"All that would be true provided the society that passed upon my right to marry would also defend my right to protect my wife and children from such degrading things as you see them surrounded with, to say nothing of protecting my son from the hungry machines in use as wealth producers. You don't understand it, Miss Holdon. You say I am sober and industrious; well, after twenty years' struggle for a home you see me and all I love in this world in poverty, and enmeshed in a struggle that can have no ending until labor has won its right to the product of its hands—ask any of the men who have kept clean in politics and fought the battles of the unions all these years; ask them if they are not poorer today than they were ten years ago. Then look at such men as Lewis and your father's superintendent, and a lot of men in little political jobs, they were labor men, and sold out. Some of them sold their unions, others sold their manhood, their political opinions. No, Miss Holdon, the man or woman who hopes to stand out for the rights of the working class against all the vice and crime and robbery of labor that goes on today must be prepared to make sacrifice of his or her life."

"But there must be a way! There is a way!" Beatrice exclaimed.

"Yes, there's a way—an honest square-out way. Let your father, Nixon, and all the other capitalists understand that this is a fight to a finish. Teach labor to know that any compromise of the issue means more charity, more strikes, more poverty, more crime. Then let us all throw off our masks and meet each other fairly and squarely upon the one issue, the ownership of the wealth

labor has created, and the machinery and land we must have with which to create things we will need for to-morrow. Of course, you will go on with your charity work until you know that a sop of even your brand of charity cannot end a class struggle in the social order." John looked quizzically at the magnate's daughter. "Do you know, Miss Holdon, in my estimation it would be just as well if you left most of the people you help to starve?"

"Oh, Mr. Bulman, that is horrid," she protested.

"Sounds so, doesn't it?" he admitted with a whimsical smile, "When you've been taught to believe charity to the poor is a part of religion."

"Mr. Bulman," the girl arose, " I have always respected you, yet I have known you looked upon my work amongst the poor as foolish, but I really thought your objection was based upon what you had seen of professional charity—I thought you misunderstood me."

"Lord love you, child, I never misunderstood you. You are one of the flowers of faith; you will come to see the sacrifice demanded of you in time. As soon as you come to know that the individual no longer counts as an individual, unless he has either greater capacity for social service or for social sin than the average man, the rest will be easy. The individual must ever be measured, so long as man holds to the path of progress, by the attitude he assumes to the social problems of his time; this and this alone gives us a line upon the worth of the individual. History is written alone about the lives of men and women who have served both truth and error in the great crises of time. I do not misunderstand you, child; I know your charity is charity; and if the rest of the world's charity were as sweet, as worthy, as pure, there would be no need for it. Within two or three years your work would be done." He paused, but the girl remaining silent, he went on:

"You do good because the system that gives you wealth also produces both poverty and crime. When you learn to examine the source from which vice and poverty spring, will be time enough for me to decide in my own mind whether or not you are to bring blossoms to the weeds, or just bloom by yourself while spending a portion

of the money your father gets from the things his workers produce for him, while the weeds grow up around you until they finally choke out your life."

"Money, money, money! How I hate the very sound of that word!" Beatrice lifted her face flushed with indignation. "My money, father's money, what difference can it make where my money comes from, even if father and other rich men are opposed to your politics and unions? If I see suffering in the homes of the workingmen I have known ever since I was a little tot, am I to be denied the privilege of helping them, just because my father says he cannot pay more wages, or allow Socialists to work for him?"

"When you understand the struggle, Miss Holdon, you would no more offer your father's money to one of his striking workmen than you would accept money that had been obtained as the price of your family honor. Your father is consistent because he understands there can be no sentiment in this struggle for the world's wealth. If your house is to stand and you are to have money for charity, the workers must be prevented from taking control of government through politics, or of industry through organization."

"Tell me," the girl demanded, "do the majority of the workers look upon charity, even my kind, as you do?"

"I believe they do—tho' they hardly know why. You know how hard it is to reach those amongst us who need help the most? You also know the so-called charity organizations reach more paupers than deserving poor. So you can see we do not want your charity even when faced by dire want—but we do want the right to make our own way in the world. We may not as yet know how to give voice to that demand, but we are learning. And remember, when you meet a man or woman who would rather starve than accept even your charity—you have met one, if they could master the words, would say to you: "Miss Holdon, your father and his friends have no right to drive us into poverty, then send you to us with the thing that will finally drive a great number of us into pauperism.'"

"Oh, how you must despise my work," her lips quivered, and great tears welled up as she asked: "Do you despise me as well?"

"Despise you, child, despise you, why you have been an angel in this house for months, even if we did not take any of your money," he laughed to hide a deeper feeling, "and your work, as you call it—" his eyes sought hers, that old quizzical smile playing over his face. "Did you ever see a sweet faced little chap playing in the dirty street, so intent upon his labors as he heaped together a pile of dust that the next gust of wind would catch up and scatter to the farthest corners of the city—so busy that the roaring traffic of the street seemed to him afar off?"

"Yes, and I have seen those little tots all but killed because they had forgotten that the street was not all their world," she answered.

"Exactly," he replied, "and that is your work as I see it; the innocent labor of a sweet child in the world's great thoroughfare. A work that may not endure. When you come to know the cause of poverty you will realize that I am right."

"So you look upon my work as that of a child in the street?" It was a question, not a retort. Measuring him from head to foot she asked: "Why do men like you keep up this fight? Is it because you love the men you seek to have join your unions and vote the Socialist ticket?"

"Love the men," John repeated after her, "me love them?" Smiling grimly, he plunged on, "I do not love them. As far as I am concerned about them individually I would not shed a tear if half of them were converted into fertilizer between this and tomorrow." Keenly questioning her with his eyes he asked: "Do you think I go out on the street corners and talk to the workers, smug faces, snobs, and thoughtless boys who congregate, because I love them? Well, I don't. The only thing that keeps me in this fight is this: I fear the power of their ignorance over my life, and the lives of those I love."

"You fear the power of their ignorance over your life, and the lives of those you love," she repeated after him.

CHAPTER VI.

CHARLES AUGUSTUS' CHARITY LIST.

Beatrice Holdon looked out upon a world of perplexities when she drew aside the lace draperies and sent the slatted night shades rattling into their housings on the morning set for her initiation into the mysteries of the "hunt." She little dreamed that she was the quarry the huntsman had determined to run to earth. Had she known this, she would still have been ignorant of the fact that he would come to the chase armed only with a quiver of lies.

Donovan's wife had told her the evening before that Bulman had been arrested on a street corner for talking treason. Donovan was a worker in Holdon's foundry, and a staunch Republican, but he declared Bulman's arrest an outrage against free speech. "Bulman has peculiar ideas and all that, but he's a good neighbor, and a man," he insisted.

Beatrice was worried. That insistent sentence of Bulman's: "I fear the power of their ignorance over my life, and the lives of those I love," kept repeating itself in her mind. That night in a dream she had stood before a howling mob and hurled this pathetic denunciation into their weird, upturned faces.

As she looked down into the dewy garden with its wealth of early morning lights and shades and an all-pervading perfume of sweet bloom, she thought of her father and brother. Did she love them as she had before she met the man Bulman? Was there a fear creeping into her life, a fear that Bulman was right? Could it be possible that if she knew the real cause of poverty the desire to practice charity would die?

Did it matter where money came from, she asked herself, and sat idly looking out over the shrubbery while her mind wandered at will over the many problems she had set herself to solve.

With a start, she remembered how much it had cost her to go to Bulman's after her brother had acted a mean part—that was but an individual case. Bulman denied the power of the individual to affect anything, move anything, until his individuality was swallowed up in the demands of a great class in the social order. Then, and then only, the individuality of the stronger, abler individual would appear above the heads of the host moving to take the vantage ground spied out by the indivivdual; but the individual would sink to the level of the average, were it not that the host bore him up on their shoulders. Would it be as hard, cost as great a sacrifice, she asked herself, to go to the poor with her mite of charity as it had been to go to Bulman's that last time, did she know the true relation between rich and poor—between wages and ownership of the workers' product?

If Bulman were right, even her charity was an insult to the poor. If he were wrong, she would convince him—she considered him well worth saving. It was wretched of him to flaunt love, charity and kindliness and insist that the struggle must grow more bitter as great fortunes accumulated. His insistence that sickening filth, awful crimes, wretchedness and vice, and the all but unbearable suffering of the very poor must go on so long as her father and others took millions out of the industries each year shocked her.

"Oh, it cannot be true," she told herself over and over again. "It cannot be true. It's too hatefully hard and cruel. Christ's life and death were meant for more than that—it can't be true."

"A gentleman to see you," her maid announced from the door.

Getting up from the window and her dreams, Beatrice sent her compliments and assurance that she would be down in a short time. Standing before the mirror after the girl had gone she looked beyond the reflection of her superb person, and asked: "Why not ask him? His people are of the real aristocracy—the aristocracy of birth—while I, if I belong at all, am but one of the new rich. And Beatrice, my dear, there's a vast difference between the worth of a family pride built upon the lives of men and women who have been of worth to the world through long generations of family building, and one

built upon a difference in the price of pork or pig-iron yesterday and today—anyway, he ought to know. He's given liberally to charity, and all the people I know, even Joel says he's too good to live—I'll ask him."

While Beatrice was prepared to treat him as an oracle, C. Augustus Wetherby was putting the finishing touches to a fixed determination to win her, and incidentally the Holdon millions.

"Confounded bore some of the fellows would call this charity stunt," he chuckled, "but it's got several redeeming features—especially when the woman furnishes the coin. First, it gives her a whole lot to think about besides her husband; next, it gives him an opportunity to develop some charity work of his own; and that coupled to business and the club ought to give a fellow leeway enough—and, by gad! the girl's worth it. Got spirit, good figure, and stunning good looks, by gad! And I'm the candy. Anything she sees I see—whatever she wants done I do it." He faced the door through which he expected her to enter. "My jewel," he whispered, "I am Naomi turned inside out, made up-to-date and to order. Your people shall be my people, however much they may smell of onions, garlic and frouzy cheese. Your God shall be my God, even if he calls me into a Free Methodist camp-meeting where heels rule higher than thinking machines. I am yours—a sacrifice on the altar of love, and——"

"Good morning, Mr. Wetherby." The voice came from behind him, and he was disconcerted.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Did my sudden salutation startle you?"

"I assure you it did—it was as though the goddess of the morning had assumed shape and voice." Noting her quick frown, he hurried on, as he offered his hand, "You see I was so absorbed in the thought of meeting upon common ground, one who believes in—in—in—well, to use the plain every day term—believes in charity."

"And you really believe in charity?" Her whole heart was in the question.

"Why yes, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; I have for years; but some people say such horrid things against it; while so many who claim to

know all about it say in just so many words that my work is not charitable at all——"

"They're beasts!" the gallant lover exploded, and begged pardon the next instant: "I mean they're worse than—why Miss Holdon your work is—is—in fact, is above reproach." He drew his handkerchief from the pocket from which it peeped so gracefully, and industriously wiping his ruddy countenance sought to get back to earth.

"I am glad to have your approval," his hostess assured him as she led the way to the library.

When they were seated she went on: "I thought we might as well spend an hour or so on your charitable organizations before going out. You see, the women will not have their work done up much before 10 o'clock, and by that time I can have a pretty fair understanding of the difference between your pet charities and my own work."

Mr. Wetherby sat limp by the great library table, occasionally lifting his eyes to the girl on the other side. "Did you bring the list along?" she inquired, smiling sweetly across at him.

"Oh yes, certainly," he thrust a hand into his pockets one after another and finally produced the document.

"Now don't you think if you were to let me take the list and run through it, you could explain the aims, objects and methods of work employed by these organizations?" She reached for the paper. He hesitated, but being unable to formulate an excuse for refusing her request, reluctantly handed it to her.

Beatrice took the list, comprising some two dozen organizations. Some of them were quite well known to her, and as she read her face grew radiant with hope. This young man was a charity worker. He would understand her troubles. He should be the link necessary to strengthen her against Bulman's attacks.

"My, you are a worker!' She looked her admiration and entirely misunderstood his blushes. "And do you support all these institutions?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"It's lovely, perfectly lovely. Why, Mr. Wetherby, I never thought of any one being so liberal in his support of sweet charity." With eyes intent upon the end of her

right forefinger as it slowly checked off his hastily prepared charities, he was startled by her next speech.

"Oh, Mr. Wetherby, I've found something. Here's Andrews Woman's Home on your list—now, I wonder how much you have given them?" The visitor moved uneasily in his chair.

"How much? You surely know—why, I can tell to a dollar what each of my cases has cost me."

"Of course I know," C. Augustus replied quickly. Here was something he thought he might play to the limit and she couldn't catch him. "You see I couldn't name the figure offhand without—well, I believe I do know, for a wonder. Yes, I gave them fifty dollars six months ago, and last month they came to me with a poor mouth and I put up a cool hundred."

"You did!" she exclaimed. Getting up hurriedly she left the table and soon returned with a large scrapbook. "Well," she declared triumphantly, "you were robbed of just one hundred and fifty dollars. Read that."

For a year Beatrice, in defense of her system of giving, had been gathering every scrap of evidence published in the press of the city relative to charity frauds. The volume of evidence she handed across the table to her guest told, in a clipping at the end of her finger, of the raiding of the "Andrews Home," and laid bare the system of robbery practiced alike upon the public and the poor women it was supposed to support.

"And only last month you gave them one hundred dollars. It almost makes me cry when I think of the good I could have done with it—and they were exposed in all the papers three months ago."

"I assure you, Miss Holdon, I do not give as blindly as that as a rule." The visitor had assumed a fine air of superiority, but it evaporated suddenly as she began:

"I believe you agreed to cut out all unworthy organizations, did you not?" C. Augustus nodded in the affirmative. "Then here goes the pencil through this one. 'Blind Man's Protective Union,'" she slowly read from the list, and asked "what do you know about this one?" With elbows on the table before her, and a sweet, dimpled chin supported by an arch formed of interlocked hand, the girl sat regarding the representative of organized charity.

"Well, yes, I can tell you something about that one. They're a jolly nest of old bats, and——"

"Old bats?" the inflection was strong.

"Yes, that's what they call each other—sort of a pet name—they're all right, all right."

"What does this union do for them, may I ask?"

"Do for them? Why, it furnishes them a club room with pool and billiards—and, and lots of things," he insisted.

"Pool? So the old bats play pool. Now Mr. Wetherby, would you mind telling me what kind of pool those blind men play?"

He stared at her for a moment, then the answer came, and he wondered a hundred times afterward how it happened to slip out.

"Blind pool of course."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, drew the pencil across the "Old Bats' Union," then gave her attention to the next on the list, while Mr. Wetherby wondered what next, and thanked his lucky stars she had not pressed the Old Bats further.

"The Little Ones' Provident Association," she read from the list, and asked: "What do you know about it?"

"Oh, that's one I got interested in through an old hen—I beg your pardon, an old lady who brought me a prospectus a long time ago, and I've kept giving whenever they sent for the mazuma."

Beatrice got up from the table. "Mr. Wetherby," she said, "I must insist that you treat me differently—no, not me, but the thing we are discussing. Old hen and mazuma may sound all right when a lot of thoughtless young fellows are together; but here with me it isn't just the language one would——"

"I implore your forgiveness, Miss Holdon. Please believe me, I meant neither disrespect to you, to charity, or to the others—I was thoughtless." Beatrice accepted the apology as sincere, and said as she took her seat:

"I may have been rude—I was, but I am so in earnest, and I do so need your help, and you seemed——"

"I seemed a fool," he broke in, "but I am not; and you shall have my help. I want to confess that I don't know a thing about those charities," pointing to the list.

"What money I have given to charity has simply been given—I never asked, knew, or cared where it went." He drew a deep breath and looked at her squarely. "There, it's out at last, but if you had pushed on down that list I'd have put my foot into it deeper and deeper, so I thought I had best make a clean breast of it. Will you forgive me?"

Ignoring his offence as well as his plea for forgiveness, she asked:

"And you gave all your money to organizations you knew nothing about, and never knew whether it reached those it was intended for or not?"

"That's about the size of it," he admitted, and lied like a gentleman, for he had never given a cent to charity in his life, tho' he had managed to gain a reputation as a charity worker, and any number of dollars from his father whom he had taught to believe the fiction.

Beatrice was looking beyond him, her eyes suffused with unshed tears, as she said: "I wanted to ask you some questions this morning. I need help so badly that——"

"Tell me what you want. I'll do all you ask—why, Miss Holdon, I'll throw that infernal list in the fire—we won't even think of it again." She heard little, or at least heeded but little, that he was saying, and startled him with her next question.

"Do you know anything about the working people? What they talk, what they think?" She was thinking of her last visit to Bulman's.

Wetherby got instantly to his feet, and striking the table with his fist exclaimed: "Now you give me something to talk upon. Why, Miss Holdon, I know the working people like a book. They talk rot. The lazy beggars would be paupers if they were not driven to work—why, they're so ignorant that any flannel-mouthed chump can organize them to strike, and murder, and chase after red flags. And by the eternal, their brats are as impudent today as their fathers were ten years ago."

"Do you believe they do not think—that they must be driven to work?" The question came in level tones.

"I know it. Hasn't the old—I beg your pardon—my father had all kinds of trouble in his refineries for ten years? What do they expect? Automobiles and pianos

for their disgustingly dirty shacks? Miss Holdon, such men as your father and mine stand between the working cattle and starvation, yet they are talking today of taking our property away from us."

"Still you contend they do not think?"

"Why as for that, I suppose they call it thinking, but I tell you it's nothing in God's world but anarchy. What would you think if it was put to you squarely to give them all your wealth and let them divide the profits of your father's business amongst them?" Confident of the answer he waited.

After due deliberation she replied: "If it would lift from their homes the blight of poverty and make them and their children happier and better, I would say amen."

He sat down suddenly and looked at her with a growing wonder in his eyes.

"I fear the power of their ignorance over my life," she repeated aloud, and the man took it as a text.

"That's it," he exclaimed, "the power of their ignorance over our lives. You let them get the upper hand. Let those ignorant demagogues rant and rave, and the ignorant ones will be the first to follow. As soon as the noise gets high enough the rest will fall in line, and hell—I beg your pardon, but I mean it—hell will be to pay. I tell you we have got to keep the laboring people in their place. If the laborer wasn't so beastly ignorant he would know who to thank for his bread and butter. You never said truer words in your life—it's the thing we rich men have most to fear—the power of their ignorance over our lives. Just look at the trouble we are having with them now, and more coming."

"But it was a laboring man who said that, not I," she interrupted. "And he said it of his own class, meaning that the rich could do anything they wanted to with the workers, and for that reason he feared them."

"Like their impudence," was his only comment.

They sat silent for a time, then Beatrice said: "Mr. Wetherby, I want to know which is right, you or this workingman. I am in deadly earnest. It seems to me you are too partisan. Yet, when I think of it, I know a Socialist who contends that your attitude toward labor is the only honest one an employer may hold. He says in so many words that the logical attitude for an employ-

ing capitalist is to buy labor in the cheapest market and sell the laborers' product in the highest—and on top of that asserts his faith in our ultimate overthrow. The thing I want to get at is the cause that must underlie such extreme opinions as Mr. Bulman and you hold. I know so little, and hope so much—I want to find a middle ground where I may exist and be comfortable. I cannot be comfortable with all the vice, and crime, and poverty, and strife I see about me. I hoped so much from our discussion this morning—and you are even more bitter than my brother, if that be possible."

While the girl sat silent, thinking how deeply she had been disappointed, yet how fully her faith in her own work had been vindicated, as against organized charity, her visitor was busy rearranging his lines of battle.

Woman has always been a puzzle to man—and worth a life of labor, even though death come before the solution. Wetherby felt that the young woman across the table from him was the limit, he also felt that he would need time in which to equip himself for the battle, and was greatly relieved when she said:

"I had expected to have you escort me to several places I must visit today, but your limited knowledge of real charity, coupled with your extreme views upon the integrity of the working people, makes me doubt the—the—wisdom of exposing you to a nearer view of their 'disgustingly dirty shacks.'" There was a wealth of contempt in her voice, and it went home.

"I am sorry to have offended; sorry to have suffered in your good opinion. However, you misjudge me. I need to learn—may I come again when I have had time to investigate some of the things we have discussed?"

He left with a reluctant consent to his plea.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO IS JOHN BULMAN?

"Who is John Bulman?" a stranger in the city asked of a friend who was quoting Bulman, and urging this stranger to hear him.

"Bulman is a man, besides he is a husband, father, citizen, mechanic and student; yet, withal, those who sit in judgment upon the world say he is a fool, and prove it to the satisfaction of the majority of those who care to listen."

"Why is this man a fool?" the stranger asked.

"Because," the other answered, "his life is one long-drawn-out sacrifice for the things he believes—because he refuses to live a lie—refuses to eat from the meat pots of his time more than enough to keep soul and body together."

"That is heroic, not foolish!" the stranger exclaimed.

"Surely," the friend smiled, "the man who comes up out of the ruck of labor and brings with him both a beautiful faith and a fixed purpose—a purpose that even the crying needs of his own family may not shake, is a man well worthy the respect of even a bitter enemy."

"Why do they call him a fool, if he possesses all these fine attributes?" the stranger questioned.

"Because he is a Socialist."

"I don't blame them. This Bulman is crazy," the stranger replied instantly.

"Let us take a closer look at this man before we decide so weighty a question," the friend insisted. smiling, and straightway they discussed not Bulman, but his philosophy. Let me touch the life of this man they have forgotten, then pass on.

In his young manhood, this "fool" lived up to his present reputation, but talked like a philosopher. Born a mechanic, he was fortunate above the majority of his fellows in that when the fates were unkind when he

struggled to get away from the need of hard labor he could always go back to his tools. And he had often gone back, and as often measured his talents against the cunning of other men. The world says he has failed. When you have finished this story you will ask yourself the same old question regarding this man. To-day he is one of the three most pitiful sights this world holds—a jobless father with mouths to feed—a fallen woman—a laboring child.

John was but one of a brood of children and fought his way to a fair education. Since he refused to be bound by the religion of his mother, or subscribe to the politics of his father, the other members of the family who love the savory smell of the flesh pots had come to accept the judgment of the world upon their brother.

John Bulman has been out of work for just a month —we may understand him better if we go to his home to-night.

A brother living in a distant city had been called to our metropolis on business and had sought out this "fool"—the only member of the Bulman family who is not satisfied to be saved and to save dollars.

"Well, John, got sickness in the family?" was the first utterance of the prosperous one in the home of the "fool."

"Yes, wife has been under the weather for a while from worrying over the boy—you see Robert met with an accident, but the girls are well, and I am rugged." The "fool" stretched himself to his full height and surveyed the well groomed man before him.

"Well, it's too bad, too bad; but how's your work? You're with the Nixon Company, are you not?"

"I was," John answered, "until they demanded that I surrender my political convictions as the price of my job."

"Ah, that's it. I had forgotten—but, John, you don't mean to tell me you couldn't dodge that to save your job when your wife and boy are ill. Why, you are in no position to be independent." The prosperous member of the family was in earnest.

"Oh, I realize that," John replied, "but much as I love my family, I do not love them better than other thousands of men have loved. They dodged the issue;

their families lived for a time on the price of their surrender, but the issue they dodged still lives, while other men's wives and babies are starving for the want of more than food——"

"There you go again," the brother interrupted, testily. "Socialism, nothing but Socialism. I just thought that when they told me down the street that you were not working." The brother put a hand on John's shoulder and added: "John, you don't need to be a Socialist. You have some talent, and can make your way in the world. You don't need to take up this cry of the rabble."

"I don't need to be a Socialist?"

"No, and I tell you frankly, I wouldn't have a worker in my shops going about amongst the men trying to make them discontented." The prosperous citizen was brutally frank. This fool brother should get no encouragement from him.

"But I do even worse things than you mention," John replied.

"Worse things!"

"Yes, I go out on street corners, in halls, any place they will have me, and urge the workers to organize for the overthrow of capitalism." The "fool's" face was aglow.

"Do you wonder that you were discharged? What could you expect?"

"Brother," the fool replied, "I have not said I expected anything else—I have not complained."

"But, man alive, think of your family! What does the Bible say—the man who will not provide for his family is worse than an infidel—that's it. Worse than an infidel." Two well saved eyes accuse, but the "fool" does not blench.

"Oh, yes, I seem to remember," he replied, "and I also recall some other passages of holy writ: 'Ye shall not grind the faces of the poor,' and this one: 'Hypocrites, how shall you escape damnation—you are as whited sepulchers filled with dead men's bones.' Yes, the Bible offers consolation to all sorts and conditions of men—while as many commencing the other way around, find in it condemnation for the other fellow. But brother," he added, seriously, "it seems to me we are

wasting your valuable time. I have no present hope of bringing you to see the world as I see it, and I assure you, you cannot take me back to your religion or your politics—it's useless; let us drop it."

"I cannot. I dare not. It seems to me the Lord must have sent me here at this time, as he sent his apostles of old," the brother announced with unction. "John, you are ruining your life; your home; the chances of your children."

"He who would save his life shall lose it," John said, and for the first time a note of anger showed in his brother's voice as he said:

"I despise to hear people who have refused Christ and His salvation eternally quoting the Bible."

John's mellow laugh rang out, but he checked himself. "Brother, I beg your pardon—but your retort was discourteous—suppose we Socialists were to offer that sort of argument when men question our philosophy?"

"That's not argument, John, not argument. The Bible is an inspired work, while the trash you believe is the product of men who were every one of them soured failures."

"Brother," John took a peep into Robert's room, "don't you think the weather a safer topic, or would you like to take a look at the boy? He has been cooped up here so long that any one from the outside is a great treat to him."

"John's weakening," the good brother thought, as they went into the boy's room.

"Why, Miss Holdon, you here?" John had not seen her when he looked into the room a moment before, and went on: "This is my brother, Miss Holdon, he has just been reading the law to me. He says I don't need to be a Socialist, and all that. You two ought to be friends."

There was a deep reproach in the girl's eyes as she looked up at John, but it was a smiling face, the saved and sane brother looked into as he took her hand.

"Now, you two can say things about me to your heart's content, but I ought to warn you that if you go beyond a certain limit Robert will tell me, won't you Bob?" the father asked, stroking the pale boy's dark hair. As he turned to leave the room, he said in ex-

planation of his departure: "I promised to meet a man over in the next block at this time, and as there is hope of getting a job out of it I know you will excuse me."

The prosperous brother felt ill at ease when left with Miss Holdon and the boy. Everything about her told of wealth and refinement, and the only connection to his mind between this poor cottage housing a crippled boy, a sick woman and a man out of work spelled charity. He did not know of the great gulf that divides poverty from pauperism. He did feel that his dignity, his family, was being made to suffer keenly, and he credited himself with bearing the burden for the entire Bulman family at that moment. With this thought uppermost, he decided that he would not try to shield his criminally foolish brother. He would give the young woman to understand that the rest of the Bulman family were made of better stuff than that developed in the person of the "fool."

"I presume you are engaged in charity work," he began.

Beatrice answered "Yes," and fell to wondering what sort of man he was. He carried his head well, looked clean, but seemed to be laboring under some embarrassment.

"I am very glad I have met you here, for I want you to know that the rest of the Bulmans are not like John and——" a long pause.

"Not like John?" she questioned, seeing he was at a loss for words.

"No," said he, "so far as I know he is the only black sheep in the family, and I assure you we feel the disgrace. The idea of a man of his ability being such a fool. Look at his family. His home. And he talking Socialism and allowing you to feed his children. It's disgraceful. Absolutely disgraceful." He strode up and down the narrow confines of the room. "If he was actually in need, on account of some misfortune—his own family—I, myself, would help him."

"But, Mr. Bulman, you don't understand——"

"I do understand. John is a fool. The idea——"

"Hush," her hand lay upon the outraged citizen's arm, "Robert is crying, and—and—you are terribly mistaken—your brother would not accept a penny of my

money. He hates what the world calls charity, and I believe, has a much better reason for hating it than you can possibly have."

"Hates charity, Miss Holdon, and yet for a fool notion brings his family to a condition where they may be forced to accept it to-morrow? Really, I can't grasp it. I can conceive how you may be interested in this poor boy and John's wife, but you must know in your own heart that my brother is throwing himself and family into the gutter. Why, what chance can these children have compared to the advantages I can give mine?—and John was my superior in many ways when we were young men."

"You do your brother a cruel injustice," the girl answered quietly. "He is the grandest man I know—he has conquered himself. Won't you try to understand him, Mr. Bulman? He has put the world before his own family, and dollars and cents mean nothing to him beyond the satisfying of the simple wants of his family. He is fighting a battle for other men's children—yes, and fighting for men who are too weak, too ignorant, too selfish, to think beyond to-day."

"Are you a Socialist?" he demanded.

"No—I am more than half a coward, the rest uncertainty," she replied.

"I don't quite catch your meaning, Miss Holdon, but surely, all other things aside, you cannot defend John, or justify him in jeopardizing his family's support to the extent of giving up his work because they couldn't stand for his—his—well, let's say stirring up the men?"

For a moment Beatrice sat silent, her eyes upon the face of John's crippled son, then she looked up with a smile.

"Mr. Bulman, are you a Christian?" she asked.

"Land, yes! I've been an active worker in the church for years."

"You believe in religious and political liberty, do you not?"

"Certainly; the two are practically inseparable—but, may I ask what this has to do with John's case? You know I am not on trial," he laughed.

Beatrice's face was seriousness itself as she answered, "We are all on trial."

"Oh, yes, I suppose that is true to a certain extent, Miss Holdon, but when a man has made his peace with God, as long as he follows in the strait and narrow way, the burden is light and the way plain."

"But suppose you went down to the shops to work some morning and the president of the company should send for you to go to the office and should tell you that a gentleman who was there with him, had informed him that you were a Christian, and you should answer: 'Yes, I am a Christian, and am proud of it,' and he should say, 'Well, either you give me your promise this morning to give up Christianity or you must quit work,' what would you do?"

"The supposition is ridiculous—I beg your pardon, but it is ridiculous!" he declared with vehemence. "In the first place this is a Christian land; in the second place the cases are not parallel."

"Yet you say you believe in political liberty, and admit that religious and political liberty are inseparable."

"Surely, you don't want me to believe you dignify John's dreams by calling them either political or religious?" he insisted.

"Mr. Bulman," she replied, "your brother is not a dreamer. All the evils he fights are realities, and he believes it possible to destroy them. And I will venture that his politics is dearer to him and has cost him more of sacrifice than my religion could cost me in a thousand years. When Mr. Nixon demanded that he either give up his political convictions or his work, he asked your brother to give up more than any religion—he demanded the surrender of a man—he asked that another mental slave be born into the world, and God knows we have too many of them already." The girl arose, and bending over the boy, said: "Mr. Bulman, your brother is of more worth to the world than any thousand men who have sold their convictions." Kissing the boy, whose bright eyes thanked her a thousand fold for her defense of his father, she quitted the room.

The clock ticks off the passing time in this humble cottage, but it does not toll off the seconds in dollars and cents, dollars and cents, dollars and cents. Privation, privation, privation, are the words that come from its rusty throat.

The prosperous man sat thinking while waiting the return of his brother. So this was the daughter of a great millionaire—and she championed the fool of the family. She said she was not a Socialist—well, probably this charity work had made a crank of her. He had often heard that women, and even men, who had given years to work amongst the poor got into a way of being very uncomfortable themselves—and made others almost as nervous as well. No wonder John was "set" when he had such encouragement. That was all bosh about religion—but the girl would make a good lawyer. He wished John would hurry home—on second thought, he was rather glad he had not come—it would be best for him to go to a hotel for the night anyway. He couldn't offer John money—even a loan was out of the question just then. It did beat the dickens where money went. If John did get in the ditch, and would let him know, he would write the other members of the family and lay the case before them. But that girl—he hadn't expected to hear anything like that from her. He was glad John had not taken any of her money; he would say that much. "I'm mighty glad I wouldn't listen to him when he wanted to carry me away with him on his chase after rainbows fifteen years ago," was his thought as he surveyed the poverty of the room, and the crippled boy and the lean bed. The four other rooms he had seen came up before his mind's eye—he saw his brother walking the streets looking for work; the two daughters, of fourteen and sixteen, working, working, working, day after day; the sick wife, worn out in the years that of right should be ushering her into the mother's earthly paradise—the enjoyment of her children—all of this he saw—then his own home flashed before his mental vision. His home supported at a cost of two hundred dollars a month. Still they were not satisfied with what he could give them; his income often falling short of meeting the demands made upon it by his wife and two children—yet, if the deal that had brought him to the city were successful—and it promised well—he would double his income; his family would then be satisfied. Dreaming, dreaming, the wise man in the home of a fool hugged himself and smiled.

Of course, this wretched poverty was terrible, but

John had made his bed and must lie in it. Still, the wise man felt good—the business set for to-morrow looked good. He reached into a pocket and brought forth a gold coin.

"Here, Robert, is a little present from your uncle." He tossed the coin within reach of the boy's well hand.

"Thanks, uncle," Robert answered, tossing it back, "I couldn't take it after what you said about my father. Miss Holdon knows—he's the best father in the world. I don't need anything he can't get for me." The boy's eyes were bright and hard. Here was another social rebel born to battle for the right to a full and free manhood. A brave spirit doomed to imprisonment in a crippled body because greed had ground that body under its iron heel.

"A chip off the old block," the prosperous man muttered as he stooped to pick up the piece of gold. He looked sternly at the boy upon the lean bed.

"Robert, you may have as little understanding of the value of money as your father, but I'll warrant that the girls and your mother will know what to do with it," he ventured, as he laid the coin on the rickety little table.

"Don't you leave it," Robert panted, lifting himself until the pain in his maimed body showed through every feature on his thin face—"don't you leave it, unless you want me to tell them all the mean things you said about my father. I don't want to tell them, but if you leave that money I will, and none of them will touch it."

As he sank back upon his pillow the prosperous man took up his gold and silently left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARTHA MOVES TO TOWN.

Charles Harris is neither more nor less worthy of consideration at our hands than are the millions of his fellow toilers who plan, build and man our mighty engines of industry. Are they not planning for the greater machines of to-morrow? And will they not be asked to give life and limb to the building, together with a life slavery at the machine when it is finished? If happily their children escape the honor of being tied to the great crunching jaws of these man-built engines we shall have solved a mighty problem, and their labor will not have been in vain.

This young mechanic of ours came of clean stock, as we have seen, and had been allowed to follow his bent for mechanics without parental interference, his parents being too poor to harbor ambitions for him above the simple life of a clean living worker.

Thus we find the youth thinking day and night of the flasks, compounds, cams, cogs, pinions, levers, eccentrics, etc., etc., that shall constitute, when assembled, a moulding machine in which a perfect casting may be produced at a tithe of the cost of hand labor. As he bends to his task over a pile of moulder's sand, or takes his turn at the ladle in Winslow's foundry, his mind is also bent—bent to the task he has determined to finish.

In the residence district of the town in which Charles Harris found employment after leaving home, is the residence of "Jed" and Martha Holcomb, who sold the old "Plummer place" and rented the "home farm" in order to give Mary the advantage of an education above that obtained by the daughters of the average farmer.

Dr. Norton's wife is still telling the story of Martha Holcomb's arrival in the city as a fixture, and we append it here:

Martha, the mother of Mary, Moses and Peter, had

"I swan ef I hain't most forgot all I wanted to ask you—a-seein' that pesky nigger a diddlin' an' a daddlin' with that carpet."—Page 65.

not yet taken the last feather bed from the line, where it had been hung, together with its fellows, to air upon its arrival in town at the very peak of a hay ladder load of her household goods, before she was somewhat conversant with the neighborhood into which she was being transplanted.

"I say, there," she called to the doctor's wife, who stood in a neighboring yard directing the operations of a colored man who seemed bent upon putting in the remainder of the day beating at a single rug, while a dozen others lay ready for like treatment. The doctor's wife turned from the negro to face her new neighbor, who had advanced to the low partition fence.

"Be you a Baptis'?"

The negro paused, his arm uplifted.

"Why, yes," the doctor's wife answered in surprise; then to the darkey said: "Joe, if you don't do your work better, I'll surely have to get——" She paused there for two very good reasons. The negro went to work as though his life depended upon it, and the neighbor across the fence was talking.

"Glad to hear it," Martha responded ,"but I swan ef I hain't most forgot all I wanted to ask you—a-seein' that pesky nigger a diddlin' an' a daddlin' with that carpet—why, he's bin most all afternoon a spattin' that one piece. How much d'you hev t' pay a critter like that? I wouldn't give 'im house room. I'd a heap druther hev one of them Jew peddlers sleep in my spare bed than t' have him in th' barn—now, who's livin' on th' other side of us?—an' what church is that down th' street? I told Jed, he's my husband, an' I told Mary, that's th' slimmist one of th' two you seen in th' yard whilst you peeked out of that squatty little winder——" the woman on the other side of the fence blushed and started to stammer either an excuse or denial, but the new neighbor waved speech from that quarter aside and proceeded: "Oh, I didn't mind; I says to Mary when she noticed you, 'I reckon that's town manners,' I says, an' anyway I'm goin' t' be neighbors—an' which church did you say it was?"

"The Universalist church." It was the first chance Mrs. Norton had to answer a question, and as for Joe, he had lost all interest in his rugs.

"You don't say! A Universalite church right in our door yard, as you might say. That's just like Jed Holcomb; I told him t' be sure an' not t' git into no disreptable neighborhood, an' here he goes an' sets hisself in a stone's throw of them heathens—an' you're a Baptis'?—an' what might your husband's business be?"

"My husband's a doctor—Joe put another rug on the line, that one will have to do."

"So he's a doctor—any new babies hereabouts?" With both headshake and smile the wife answered in the negative.

"Could you say who them people is that went out in one of them newfangled contraptions they call a automobile, jest as we was a-comin' in with th' last load—them as lives over th' way in that house with all of them thingymediddles on th' portico?"

"Oh, that's Mr. Judson's place; he's a board of trade man—Joe, you must get those rugs done."

"Well, I declare! A board of trade man, an' a Universalite church, an' all in th' same yard, as you might say. You wait, I swan if Jed don't git a piece of my mind. I said partickler, when him an' Mary wanted t' sell th' lower farm an' move t' town, 'Jed Holcomb,' says I, 'I'm a Baptis', an' I'm not a-goin' t' give up my pure an' undefiled life fer neither of you, nor for nobody. If you two's set,' I says, 'on a movin' t' town you got t' hunt up a good Christian neighborhood fer me t' live in'—you jest wait till I git——"

"Mother, come here. We want to know how you want these curtains put up," a girlish voice called from the Holcomb back door.

"So you're a Baptis'—well, I'm right glad. I've got t' go now, but I'll run right over th' first thing in th' morning' an' git acquainted. We'll be glad t' hev some one t' go t' church with t' sort of break th' ice fer us, as you might say." Martha had had one eye on Joe while she was visitin' with her neighbor, and as she turned to go to the house, she threw this at him over her shoulder: "I'd like t' hev th' runnin' of you, you lazy, good-fer-nothin', I'd soon take that grin out of you."

The doctor's wife was still looking blankly at the door behind which her new neighbor had disappeared but the moment before, when she was recalled to the

present by the sound of a well-grown chuckle behind her. As she turned to look at Joe, he touched his cap and said: "She's a-comin' back in the mornin'," then gave way to another burst of mirth.

"You hardly expect me to laugh with you, do you Joe?" the doctor's wife asked, grimly, as she turned to the house.

Joe scratched his head, took a leisurely survey of the neighborhood, then fell upon the rug and beat it with a will. "Ise mighty glad my ole 'oman's a Meffodes—an' I reckon Misses Norton am right—she hain't no laugh a-comin' long as dis new one am a Baptis' like herself."

CHAPTER IX.

A WOSHIPER AND A REBEL.

Six children were born to Jed and Martha Holcomb; three died in infancy and for each visit of the grim reaper to her home Martha charged herself with some great and grievous sin against the inflexible laws of her God. After accepting her losses as direct manifestation of the displeasure of Deity, there remained but one thing to do, and she did it.

Her hand was of iron and found occupation almost daily in administering punishment upon the children left to her care. Her tongue was vitriol, and its harsh outpourings, its vicious threats even against the lives of her little ones, drove one to rebellion against both her religion and her laws, while a second defended himself by practicing dissimulation.

Moses, the older son left to them, resented the whippings and harsh commands of his mother, while secretly pitying his father, who suffered the rasping peevishness of his mentally unbalanced wife in silence.

One Sunday morning, for some trivial mischief committed by Peter and Mary, Moses was soundly whipped, then ordered into the straight-laced uniform assigned to the Christian's Sabath, and with the rest of the family hauled to church. On the way he leaned over and shaking his clinched fist in his brother's face, whispered: "If I git home alive I'm going to half kill you for lying on me this mornig."

"Half kill you" and "beat your brains out," together with "skin you alive" were favorite expressions with the Christian mother of Moses, aged ten, and Peter, aged eight. By these endearments she sought to convey love's message to her children.

Moses knew the lesson for that particular Sabbath dealt with the heious sin of blasphemy, and one of the lesson helps he had studied with the rest dealt with the

fool who had said in his heart there is no God. The text was illuminated by incidents quoted from the lives of ancient peoples, wherein those who had been foolish enough to curse God had straightway been executed. As a further support to the text, incidents said to belong to present day happenings were brought forward to prove that the Lord still dealt out swift justice against all who would dare doubt his existence.

Moses, smarting under the stripes of the lash, and suffering in his proud young soul all the tortures of the damned, had decided to end it all as soon as he got to the church. He would have cursed God out in the barn where he went to salve his bruises with tears he dare not shed under the eyes of the family if he had not wanted to make sure of finishing the thing, and he rightly judged that God, if he struck at all, would strike harder if he were cursed in his own house than if the awful sin were committed in a barn.

The rebel was ready for death. Life to him was but a rag; all of the big world's beauties were hidden from him; chattel slavery, made more hateful to him by constant reminders that he was not worth his salt, that he never stopped to think how much he owed his parents, added to the weight of a cruel mother's hand wielding a slave driver's right to beat the body of the slave with thongs of leather, and stinging serpents of hickory, had finished their work on this one boy.

The son of a sanctified mother was ready to deny God and die. Strange? No, there was nothing strange about the case. Moses Holcomb was a bound slave to his mother's one hundred religious don'ts—do you wonder that he looked upon both mother and God from a single viewpoint?

Arrived at church he sat stony-eyed while the minister and congregation read the lesson, then, when the bustle of arranging classes had subsided, he set himself to the task of defying God—the God in whom all the people he saw professed to believe with one mind and one heart.

"There is no God. There is no God. I want to die. I want to die. It's a lie, I want to die," he repeated over and over. Then waited for the bolt to fall, and was surprised as the old clock ticked off the seconds and

he still breathed. A weird thought came to him: God might be too busy listening to Deacon Jeffries to hear just a boy cursing him. He would try again. This time the little rebel was so in earnest in his appeal for release from the burden of life that his voice rang out true and clear, filling the church with its challenge to the Creator:

"It's a lie, there is no God! I want to die!"

The low hum of voices in discussion of the lesson was hushed, and on the silence there fell the heart-piercing sobs of a child, huddled in the end of a pew while his teacher bent over him with loving words and caresses. There can be but little comfort gotten from an alien hand for a soul so sore for love, so torn with doubts, so far adrift that it poured out its tide of woe and challenged God within the house of prayer to end it all.

Heads turned this way and that; some whispered, "Who is it?" others answered, "Sister Holcomb's Mose," until the desired information was well spread amongst the worshipers.

Martha left her place in the Bible class when a neighbor reaching over the back of a pew had first pinched her, then whispered, "Sister Holcomb, your Mose is a blasphemin' an' fightin' his teacher." Dropping her Bible she hurried back to where he crouched in the pew. "Here you," she began, making a dive for his coat collar, "what th' old scratch's th' matter with you? You sick?"

His mother's hands upon him acted as a tonic. His sobs were stilled. All the combativeness of the animal in a corner, bated beyond endurance, flashed up; his face grew rigid; his tear-dimmed eyes glinted. "You let loose of me," he shouted, and as Martha in sheer surprise relaxed her hold he slipped out into the aisle and ran from the church.

Out in the great cathedral he halted, but not until he had reached the cross roads, where he felt safe from immediate pursuit. Here he gave himself to the thousand doubts and uncertainties that surrounded him to mock his struggle for liberty, to be true to himself. For an hour he sat in a thicket of wild plum bushes and planned to leave his prison, and seek succor of the great world beyond the ridge of hills stretching away into eter-

nity along the western horizon. Then thinking of God's weakness as demonstrated when he had failed to make good his threat to kill, the boy came to think it just possible his mother, too, might be less sure of herself when she faced this challenge to her faith, and turned resolutely toward home, determined to fight it out with the woman—his mother.

The Sunday dinner, served at two o'clock, had long been cleared away, when Mary ran into the sitting room to announce: "He's come, mother. He's come. I seen him sneak into the barn," and out she danced to find Peter and impart the news.

"Jed, you go out to th' barn an' bring that young scamp in here——"

"Mother, I wouldn't whip th' boy—he hain't seemed like hisself th' last few days——"

"Jed Holcomb, I'm th' jedge of how I'm to bring up my children, an' I'm not a-goin' t' have you a interferin' either."

"But, mother, you hain't goin' t' whip him again to-day, be you? I tell you Mose hain't well. An' besides, he hain't had a bite of victuals to-day."

"Jed Holcomb, you don't know that boy. I tell you his spirit has got t' be broke. An' I'll do it if I have t' break every bone in his body."

"Mose hain't a bad boy, mother," the father pleaded; "he'll do anything fer me—why, he hain't never disobeyed me—an' I hain't never licked him, 'less it was 'cause you made me."

"That's right," the hysterical priestess of divine mercy shrieked, "that's right. Take his part against his own mother. Keep on an' see where he'll land. I said I'd punish him within an inch of his life fer a disgracin' me in church, an' I'm a-goin' to. You old softhead, if you hain't got gumption enough t' bring up children what d' git them fer?"

With this parting shot ringing in his ears Jed left the house hurriedly and started for the feed lot, while the mother, followed by both Peter and Mary, went to the barn.

When the voice of his mother reached him, fear of physical tortures was eating into the heart of the boy who had buried his hot, tear-stained face in the sweet-

scented clover in a far corner of the mow but a few short minutes before.

"Come out of there, you little devil"; a pause; "I kin see you. Come down here I tell you." Contempt curled the boy's lips as he lifted his head from its pillow of clover. He knew she lied. No human eye could see him in that hiding place.

"You'd better come out of there. If I have t' come an' git you it'll be th' worse fer you."

Slowly this small, ten-year-old boy, whom the boys of the neighborhood called "Skinny," because of his thin legs and slender body, lifted himself from the hay. He had returned home to fight it out with his mother, and the call had come. If he was to save the proud spirit that disdained a lie, and refused to yield its rights, he must answer the challenge. The time had come to make a last stand. If he whined and begged forgiveness here, in the future there would be multiplied demands made upon him to yield still more, as his brother Peter had yielded until he had come to prefer a lie to the truth. Once more the angry voice came up to him, and this time it was supplemented by the wicked snap of the whip lash, hungry for a taste of the child's blood. There was no escape. As he realized the import of the challenge the blood ran as liquid fire through his little body. She should not strike him with that whip. She should not! She should not! Flushed and panting, yet unafraid, he clambered over the billowy hay to the ladder leading down to—Hell.

When his feet touched the floor of the driveway he turned defiantly to face his mother. The mother had worked herself into a paroxysm of rage and stood biting her lips and switching a post with the rawhide buggy whip.

"Hain't you ashamed of yourself, you young scapegrace? A hollerin' out in Sunday school thet you wanted t' die." Moses dodged a vicious cut with the whip. "You don't need t' dodge, you little devil. I'm goin' t' half kill you. I'll learn you t' disgrace me in my own church. I'll break that spirit of yours if I kill you fer it."

"Why don't you kill me? I'd rather be dead than ——" what more he would have said was lost in the hiss

of the rawhide as it wrapped its coils about him. Again the lash fell, the boy's right wrist showing a great red welt where the angry thing had bruised him. It had bitten another place, a rivulet of blood streamed down over his cheek from a bite of the lash's end in his tender flesh. With the quickness of a cat he jumped aside as the lash fell seeking a third taste of a child's soul. Picking up a hammer that lay upon an unopened barrel of salt, he stepped back just out of reach of the whip, and cried out:

"If you touch me with that whip again I'll kill you."

Martha, blinded by rage at this open rebellion, started forward; the whip descended—the hammer sped true to its mark.

Peter and Mary ran screaming from the barn as the mother fell. "He's killed mother. He's killed mother," was the cry that reached Jed and the hired man in the feed lot.

CHAPTER X.

MOSES FINDS A MOTHER.

Moses Holcomb looked down at his mother without a tremor as she sank to the floor, then raced from the barn at the heels of the other children and, dodging behind cribs and stacks of grain, made his way to a field of growing corn and ran through it until he was hidden in a like field on a neighboring farm.

Late that night as Tom Webster was preparing to close the house for the night he happened to look out toward the Millville road. "Land sakes, Cora," he called to his wife, "I believe some of the neighbors is sick; they's a boy comin' in at the front gate."

Mrs. Webster hurried to the front door and stood waiting. The boy saw her and hesitated a moment, then advanced slowly until he stood at the foot of the steps.

"Could you—could you give me just a little piece of bread? I haven't had anything to eat to-day, an' I'd like to sleep in your barn." Cora Webster had fed tramps before, though there were but few in the country then, but this appeal from a mere baby so dumfounded her that she could not utter a word, and the boy went on:

"I am tired, lady, and I don't feel like I could go much farther"—his voice, his drooping little figure were eloquent witnesses to the bitter struggle he had endured on the road he had traveled that day. Standing there in the moonlight, a wanderer while yet a babe, more in need of a loving mother's care than ever before, he touched the great heart of a childless mother.

"Sleep in our barn, child?" she questioned, her eyes brimming with tears, "why, what call have you to sleep in a barn when there are beds in plenty?"

"I—I thought you wouldn't want me in your house," he answered, brokenly, "I wasn't going to tell you any-

thing about what I had done—but I thought I might sleep in the barn——"

"Child, child," she cried, with outstretched hands, "a boy like you can't have done anything very wrong—come in and tell me all about it."

"No, I can't come in—you don't know—I don't believe there is any God. I asked him to kill me an' he didn't, because there ain't none—and—and I killed my mother, but——"

Cora Webster was down the steps and on her knees with her arms around him before he had finished his confession.

"Oh, my boy, my boy, don't talk like that. What, oh, what have they done to you? What have they done to you?" With her arms about him she picked him up and carried him into the great kitchen, and called her husband in such peremptory tones that he came on a run.

"What in the world Cora——" he began as he came bounding in, then pausing at the sight of the boy—clothes torn in his wild flight, face bloody and stained with tears and the dust of travel, hair disheveled, wild-eyed.

"Tom, he's got a fever and is clear out of his head, and——"

"No, I ain't got no fever," the boy interrupted, "and I won't be taken back there; I'll die first. What I said was true." He looked at the great red welt across his wrist, the hot blood surging to his face. He could feel shame for his mother, even in the face of the crime he believed himself guilty of.

"Tom, he says he killed his mother," Cora whispered the awful words.

"My God, Cora, you must have dreamed it." Turning to the boy again he asked where he lived, the name of his folks, when he left home and finally, satisfied that Moses' story was at least in part true, he said to his wife: "I guess I had better take Mollie and ride over to the Holcomb neighborhood; it's only twelve miles, and you make the little chap comfortable. I reckon he's about starved, as well as tuckered out."

When her husband had gone, Mrs. Webster asked Moses, who stood looking out into the night as though he contemplated flight, yet could not bring himself to

leave until imminent danger threatened, if he didn't want to wash before he had lunch. While he removed the grime and dried blood from face and hands, she set out a lunch on the kitchen table and hovered over while he ate.

When he had finished she was seated in a big rocker by a window from which a view of the Millville road could be had. "Come over here and tell me about your trouble," she pleaded, as the boy shrank into a far corner of the room, sobbing out his thanks for her kindness. Finally she prevailed upon him to go to her. As he came to her side she put her arm about him and would have drawn him to her lap, but he hung back. To induce him to yield she told him of her one baby, who had he lived, would have been about the same age, and asked if he didn't think she would have found her boy ready to bring all his troubles to his mother's arms, even after he had grown to be a bigger boy than the little wanderer whose confidence she sought.

Tom Webster, returning home after midnight, found his wife sitting in the big rocker with the little wanderer clasped to her bosom, and he fast locked in sleep.

"She isn't dead," he whispered, as Cora held up a warning finger, "but from what I gather, I don't think I would cry if she was." Having deposited a bundle on the table he took a chair and sat by the big rocker. The moment he had entered the room and his wife caught sight of the bundle she smiled—she was to keep the little fellow who had won her heart by his sturdy defense of truth, even at a greater cost than most grown-ups are willing to pay.

But a wife would be somewhat remiss in her wifely duty did she not reprove her husband for his radical expressions, so Tom, big, whole-souled Tom, had hardly felt the chair under him before his wife said: "You mustn't say such wicked things, Tom; not even about his mother. And if he is to stay with us you must quit saying darn and words like that," at all of which the big man laughed softly, and kissed the protestant.

"Holcomb told me Moses was one of the best boys alive, though he never could get along with his mother somehow."

"I don't wonder, from what he told me," she hastily added, "but he didn't say a word against his mother, only that he was not sorry he had killed her. Think of that, Tom. He must have suffered dreadfully."

"Yes," Tom answered. "I guess the little chap had a rather tough time of it, and Holcomb allowed if we'd just as soon keep him for a while he'd pay his keep. I told him we had no children and would be glad to have the boy, and pay him something besides."

Cora nodded her appreciation, and asked: "Did you see that woman?" then bent to kiss the scar left by the lash on the boy's cheek.

"No, I didn't; she's some knocked out, I guess. The hammer hit her on the forehead, Holcomb says, and from what others told me I judge the handle seemed to think the hammer hadn't done enough, so it up and swatted her one in the mouth, loosened a few teeth and cut her lips a bit."

"Don't, Tom dear," the wife protested, and added, "I'm so glad she isn't badly hurt, and that this poor little soul found his way to us."

"Here, too, little woman. I make no doubt but that the boy has good stuff in him, and if he has," the loyal husband declared, "he gets his chance if he stays with you."

"And about church, Tom?" She looked up, a frown of perplexity on her face. "He declares there is no God. What are we going to do with him if he don't want to go to church??"

"Do with him, girl?" Tom laughed softly. "Do with him? Why we'll just turn him out with the colts on Sunday—poor little devil, he's had enough religion hammered into him to make a man, a full-grown man, want to go to hell rather than meet the people who have religion in heaven."

"That's awful, Tom, simply awful, and you must not talk that way before him. He's going to look up to you, and admire you, and see things as you see them, and I want you to be careful."

"Of course I'll be careful, you goose. But I can say things when he's sound asleep, can't I?" The wife smiled at his banter, and he went on: "Seriously, wife, the boy is more nearly religious than some of the folks I met

over in the Holcomb neighborhood. They all said he cursed God and asked for him to strike. And them neighbors think the boy is an awful sinner. Now, I don't know how you look at it, but it seems to me if God is doing business in heaven he took a darned sight more stock in the boy's blasphemy, his calling out to be killed, his heart busting with agony, than he did in a lot of ready-made prayers that went up to him yesterday. Yes siree, that boy's defiance, was the grandest prayer that reached the throne of grace yesterday, unless," he quickly added, "some other poor souls were in as tight a place, and, knowing as little, were firing their curses at the God they had been taught to believe in."

"Tom, it's positively scandalous for you to talk that way, when you know you are as good a Christian as lives," the wife protested, and Tom chuckled as he stooped to kiss her, and observed:

" 'Bout time to put the youngster to bed, and crawl in ourselves, if we expect to git up in time to milk Boss before she bellers her head off. Give me the boy, and you run along and open up the bed."

CHAPTER XI.

THE INVESTIGATION OF THOMPSON.

Charles Harris had not been a resident of the town very long when his room-mate, Robert Thompson, insisted that he go to the First Baptist Church with him, just once anyway, and see the prettiest girl in the town. As Charles objected on the score that he found better employment for his spare time working on plans for his great machine, Bob insisted the stronger, and informed his auditor that he (Bob) had a great mind to try his luck at capturing the alluring maiden. Finally Charles consented to go "just once." The result was that both young men attended services at the First Baptist Church until Bob captured the coveted prize. The most remarkable feature in the transaction was the sudden cooling of Charley's religious ardor and his close application to work.

"Bob" Thompson had been basking in the smiles of Mary Holcomb for at least two months, while his room-mate gave his time to labor, when he came in one Sunday night and found Charles still at work on the rough drawings for the machine.

"Wake up, old man, I want to talk to you," Bob said, slapping him on the back.

Charley pushed back from the table. "I was just going to quit, my eyes hurt; fire away," he replied.

Bob pulled a chair up, and after he had sat for a little time with his eyes on the floor, he looked up and said: "You remember that girl I wanted to show you?" Charley nodded. "Well I've been to her home a number of times. The first time her mother just eyed me; every move I made, whether I could see her or not, that old woman's eyes were fairly screwed into me—and if I so much as looked at Mary she'd manage to wiggle around where she could get between us."

"Well, it's interesting all right," Charley smiled broadly, and asked, "what happened the last time?"

"Happened!" Bob fairly shouted, "It mostly happened between times. You see, the old woman got out of Mary all she knew about my boarding place, where I work, and about my aunt who lives here. Last Tuesday morning she started out to investigate——"

"Investigate?"

"Yes, the old lady went first to the boarding house and when I went to dinner the star boarders, the girls and Mrs. Williams, had their faces fairly splitting. I couldn't think what ailed them, and the next morning when I went to work Wilson called me into the office. 'What did you send that old snoop here for?' that's the way he started in on me. 'I didn't send anyone here,' I told him, and I guess he tumbled; Lord, how he laughed! 'Well, I wish you luck, my boy—but,' he added, 'it costs you your job if she turns up again in business hours and pumps me another quarter of a day, mind that.' I was feeling pretty cheap when I went out of the office, but that was easy compared to going back to Mrs. Williams', for you see I had tumbled to the fact that I owed that outfit of grins to Mrs. Holcomb's having been there, too. But that wasn't the worst. Day before yesterday I got a note from my aunt saying she wanted to see me. Of course I went, but, on the dead, if I had known that the old lady had been out there trying to pry the lid off our family history I'd have left town first."

"Why in the world did——"

"Don't break in until I get through. Let me get it all off my mind," Bob implored. Charley nodded assent, but the grin on his face was a challenge in itself.

"Grin, blame you, I know it's fun for you. Well, as soon as I got out to aunt's she looked me all over in the queerest way, then asked me if I knew anyone named Holcomb. Guess I must have blushed or something, for she said, 'Then that woman wasn't altogether crazy.' 'Has she been here?' I managed to ask, and I felt like crawling through the floor. Then aunt handed it to me straight. 'Yes,' she had her nose up a mile as she said it, 'she's been here—and Bobby, I want to know what sort of outlandish people you are associat-

ing with?' Mind, if you should ever think of marrying into that family I would disown you.' When she shot that at me I got hot under the collar and did a little talking on my own account. I'm afraid, now, that I talked Mary pretty strong."

"You don't need to worry over that, Bob; you couldn't talk her half as strong as she deserves," Charley interrupted, and this time he blushed and looked down as he caught the quick and comprehending look Bob gave him.

But the latter only grunted as he went on with his story: "After my little spiel, aunt took another tack, and told me how Mrs. Holcomb had introduced herself and assured aunt that I was 'a-payin' particular attentions to her darter, as you might say.' Then she went after our family history and stuck to it until aunt was at her wits' ends—but that isn't the worst."

"Isn't the worst," Charley repeated after him.

"No! You see, when I got away from aunt's and had another set-to at the boarding-house I was in just the proper shape for a fight. I had made up my mind that Mrs. Holcomb had shot her wad, and I proposed to take a turn with the gun myself. You know I went to choir practice last night?" Charley nodded. "Well, I met Mary, as a matter of course—and I don't believe to this minute that she knows anything about the old woman's butting in. Anyway, I made a date for to-night, and took her home from practice. When we got home from church Mary took my hat and we had just got seated in their stuffy little box of a parlor when the old lady came in, leading Jed by the arm. When she'd got him into the room she said: 'Jed, you take Mary and go out to the kitchen—I'm goin' t' have a word with Mr. Thompson.' You could have put me in a mighty small package, Bob admitted, mopping his face as he proceeded. "Mary looked scared, and Jed tried to say something, but it got mixed up with a cough or two, and neither of them came out right, and she just bundled them out. By that time I was ready to run; somehow my desire for fight had evaporated, and I wanted to pray, or anything to get rid of the interview I could see coming my way. She pulled a chair over in front of me, and plumping herself down in it grabbed

both arms, as though, if I made a wrong move, she fully intended to jerk them off and bat me over the head with them. 'I want to ask you, young feller, what your intentions is?' was the first thing she fired at me, and her nose wasn't two feet from mine—I guess that was the highest I looked during the whole interview—and I guess I must have given her a foolish answer, for——"

"I'd like to have a woman try that on me," Charley interposed.

"Would, eh? Well, it's up to you if you want to try it."

"What do you mean?"

"Wait until I get through."

"You don't mean to tell me you let the old lady run you off?"

"Can't you wait? Where was I? Oh, yes—she'd asked me about my intentions, and then opened up again: 'Young feller, I've bin waitin' quite a spell a-tryin' t' decide jist what my Christian duty t' my darter was; an' I was led t' ask th' parson—he told me to oncet —investigate that young man's anti-cedents. Jed 'lowed that word meant a considerable, an' th' doctor's wife, she said it meant your family history an' actions an' sich; an' she seemed real interested.'"

Bob eyed the grinning mechanic on the other side of the table. "Darn you, I'd like to throw something at you," he confessed.

"Wait a week," Charley advised; then promised not to grin if Bob would finish the story.

"Well, here goes. 'Now, young feller,' she says to me, 'you might jist as well understand first as last that I hain't bin readin' them city newspapers all these here months fer nothin'; an' I don't propose that none of them wolves in sheeps' skins as is a-triflin' with all th' young girls they chance upon shall rend an' tear my one ewe lamb.'

"Right there I tried to get in a word, but she wouldn't have it. 'You jist keep still till I'm through, an' then if you've got th' brass t' brazen it out, why, jist crack your heels together—but I warn you Jed's in th' back room, so you be careful what you say to me.' Now, wasn't that a pretty stiff proposition to go up against?" Bob asked.

Charley ignored the question and asked for the rest of the story.

"I told her I was perfectly harmless, and she lit into me again: 'I follered the advice of th' doctor's wife an' my own conscience, an' I can say they hain't anything I hev hearn about you as makes me hanker t' have you fer a son-in-law. You smoke—an' you hev flirted with all sorts of girls—an' your father's family was all Piscopalians, an' your mother's folks didn't have no religion at all, an' as far as your own goes, young feller, your own boss told me you worked on Sundays, an' he admitted t' me that you swore like a pirate; an' your aunt says you will be th' death of her with your wild ways, an' besides, she told me you had inherited fits from some of the family, an' was like to come down with them at any time; an' your boarding missus, arter I'd told her of my tryin' to protect my Mary, she up an' told me you wasn't no more of a Christian then Bob Ingersall, an' she allowed you never went t' th' Baptis' church till Mary come t' town, an' she told me t' beware.' She did halt there to take a fresh breath," Bob observed with a sigh, then continued: "In the next round she came in strong on her religion, and knocked me plumb out of the box. 'I want you t' know that I'm a Baptis' as believes ev'ry word in th' Bible, an' I had all th' fightin' fer souls I want when I undertook t' tear Jed Holcomb as a brand from th' burnin'. Young feller, Jed was as stiff-necked an' uncircumcised a sinner as ever I seen 'fore I set eyes on you, when I took him in hand—an' he's saved to-day. Now, what I want to know is, are you goin' t' pester Mary any more?'"
Bob paused.

"And you sneaked," Charley sneered as he reached up and felt along the shelf above his head for a pipe.

"Sneaked? Why, no, not immediately—I simply told her she was wasting her breath—that I was innocent of practically everything my friends had charged me with, but as she so strongly objected, I would not see Mary again—why, I'd as soon be in the infernal regions, with my back broke, as to marry a woman from that school."

"Bobby, you didn't love the girl—no, it wasn't love," then after a pause: "I believe you said it was up to me?"

"Yes, I said it; and I'll bet you the price of a wedding suit that you don't last as long as a politician in heaven."

"That's a go," Charley answered with gusto; "put it at fifty dollars, and I'll enter the lists."

"All right, it's up to you, and I will give you just three months from to-night to make good," Bob declared.

"That's about October 1st," Charley commented, as he shook hands across the table with his room-mate and one-time rival, though the rival was all unconscious of having played the part.

CHAPTER XII.

MOTHER HOLCOMB IS CIRCUMVENTED.

October 1st came as must come all dates between this and the final date of time, and found Charley Harris bending over the plans for the coming automatic moulder, which were spread out on the table of his and Bob's room, when the latter entered, and without a word laid a check for fifty dollars on the table in front of the mechanic. As Charley looked up after examining the bit of paper thrust between him and his work, Bob said:

"Not a word, old man—you won it fairly, and if you didn't, I would have held you to your end of the wager."

"But I don't want the money, Bob; it would have served me right if I had lost out—and do you know I sometimes feel a bit mean when I think of the way I took to win it—and the girl. Still, I love Mary, and she was worth winning, even as I won her."

"That's the point, Charley. Tell me how you circumvented the old lady; but first put that check in your pocket."

"Bobby," said Charley, and he looked his grimmest, "for what I've done may the Lord forgive me. I've lied; I've cozened my mother-in-law-to-be; I've swallowed the Baptist church whole; I've mothered her; I've accepted her Bible and whole philosophy of life at her figure, and am to pay her out in a life service to a God who wouldn't be allowed to do more than one year's business in a barnyard, for any careful breeder of improved stock. I've raked Father Jed over the coals for his religious shortcomings, and the one spot of saving grace for me, so far as the old folks are concerned, lies in the fact, or rather conviction I hold, that the old man is on."

"On to what?" Bob demanded.

"On to me with both feet. This is how I got next: About a month ago he ventured an opinion on a matter of faith; mother-in-law-to-be snapped him up in a minute, and I piled in and helped her pulverize him. When I had finished, the old lady was chuckling, and I turned to Jed to see how he was taking his medicine—skin me, if he didn't wink at me and grin. Of course I wasn't absolutely certain, but after he had shaken hands twice with me as I came away, I began to do some tall thinking about the state of Father Holcomb's immortal soul."

Bob was anxious to have the meat of the story, but Charley insisted at this point upon putting his pipe in commission before he proceeded. "Last week I had another chance to help the old lady out, and it seemed to me Jed had perked up quite a bit in combativeness, just to give me a chance. While the battle raged, I got two of the broadest winks ever, and when I started away the old man followed me to the gate and was so all-fired good to me that I up and asked him for Mary. Bob, he led me right back to the house; caught the old lady with her shoes off and her hair down and had the thing fixed right there—then Mary and I got our first hour alone in almost three months—well, I guess I earned it all right."

"I don't see the connection between Mr. Holcomb's friendliness and your antagonism," Bob insisted, with a puzzled look.

"Took me two weeks to figure it out," Charley laughed. "You see, it is this way—you know Mrs. Holcomb," Bob screwed his face into a grimace. "You remember she gave herself credit with having snatched Jed as a brand from the burning?"

"Well, he's just a bit nearer that lake of brimstone than he was before she saved him—unless the Lord will allow him to enter a plea of self-defense, and nolle pros. the indictment against him. He's a hypocrite and he knows I'm another."

"And misery loves company, eh, Charley??" was the sum of Bob's comment.

* * * * * *

Within a month after the wedding, Charles Harris might have been found hard at work in Father Holcomb's barn where he had fitted up a shop and was get-

ting his machine under way. Jed was his constant companion, and by much urging had induced Charley to use some of his funds for material and tools with which to push the work in hand.

After all the years of dreaming, planning and modeling, the inventor had at last come to the promised land. No longer were such trivial things as a mother-in-law's objection to the neglect of Wednesday evening prayer meetings, or a wife's plea that she hardly ever saw him, to interfere with the prosecution of his work. Feverishly he labored—begrudging even the time he took at table as so much time lost.

When the young folks were married and Charley had moved his possessions to the Holcomb home, the father seemed to take new hold upon life, and a transformation was wrought that boded but ill for Martha's rule. Now it was Jed who defended Charley when either of the women complained of his underworship and overwork. In turn Charley grew perceptibly weaker in defense of the great truths promulgated by his mother-in-law. But she knew Jed so well, or at least thought she did, that she straightway laid all the younger man's sins at her husband's door. He denied strenuously that he was in any way culpable, and as firmly insisted that Charley's being so ambitious to make a fortune out of his machine was all that ailed him.

Within six months after his marriage, thanks to the assistance of the head of the house, the automatic moulder was built and ready for a test.

As an especial mark of honor, Bob Thompson was invited to witness the testing of the first machine for casting iron automatically.

Mary and her mother visited the shop early in the morning and found the mechanic filling the small furnace for a test heat. When they entered he dropped the "pig" he was about to put into the furnace and put his arm about his wife's waist. "Mary, it's one of the happiest days of my life," he told her. "When I went into the foundry as a boy I thought of that machine you see standing there, and not a day has come since that I have not divided my thoughts between the machine and the other things I had to think of to live."

auditors—"It works perfectly, so I guess I will put on the belt and run it empty for a few minutes before giving it the iron—then you will see it do the work of fifty men as long as the iron lasts."

"If it does that why not put it to work in the foundry?—you say it is not to go out of this shop." Bob could not catch the mechanic's viewpoint.

"But this isn't the machine I now have in mind," the inventor protested. As the belt crawled slowly into place on the tight pulley and the machine began its labor, he went on, "This machine simply demonstrates the reasonableness of my hope to make it more nearly automatic, more rapid, more compact, and consequently less expensive to operate—now watch. Remember, I have never tested the assembled machine, yet I would stake my life on its doing the work, for each part has been tested separately. That's the hand process of manufacture, here all the hand tools are coördinated and the machine takes the place of skilled workers and operates all these tools at once, where they could only be used one at a time. Now watch closely as I lift this gate, iron as thin as water, and as hot as a place we have heard mentioned, father—" he looked up at Jed, and both smiled—"pours out into this measuring device and tips into the flask. Watch the next flask come up for its share of the molten iron. Now, come over on this side and watch the filled flask; see? As it comes to this side it begins to open—there you have the finished product. Don't touch it," he called out as Bob stooped and was about to take hold of the casting just ejected from the machine. "It's all but red hot," Charley warned him, and then said: "Keep your eye on that empty flask; see, it next stops over a blast of cold air, while the flask on the other side is taking its charge. The cold blast reduces the heat of the mould so it will the more readily absorb the heat from the next charge of metal."

While the machine labored on, kicking out casting after casting, the three men stood about it in silence. Charley finally took up a bucket of water and cooled off the first castings from the "Harris Automatic Moulding Machine." Taking up the first one that came from the machine he said: "This is the only thing I shall save

from all the visible results of my years of labor—the first perfect casting from an automatic machine."

He stood erect, the pride of power, of mastery, illumining his face. "To-day," he looked from one to the other, "I shall break this machine up, and to-morrow, if you care to look at it, it will be found in the alley yonder, on exhibition in the form of junk—a mass of twisted and broken metal—nothing more."

"Charley," Jed protested, "it's cost you more than a thousand dollars, 'sides your time, and as old junk it won't bring ten dollars—what sort of talk——"

"That's all true, father, but I'm talking sense just the same. This machine will be more valuable to me as junk than it is in its present form. To build it on lines I now have laid out it must be rebuilt from the ground up. So it has to go, and so have I."

"Not leave us, Charley!" the old man protested.

"Yes," the mechanic with a vision before him, replied kindly, "I've got to have better facilities for work and better materials to work with. In fact, I've got to go to a big city where all my wants may be supplied at first hand—and, anyway, my machine belongs to the big cities; it would be worse than useless in Winslow's foundry."

Bob's eyes were filled with wonder of the thing—here was a mechanic who had given years of labor to the accomplishment of a single task, and in his hour of triumph over all his fears he quietly condemned the visible result of those hungry years to destruction, and did it with a smile—it was all outside Bob Thompson's comprehension. He gave one more look at the machine as it stood silent after its work was finished, then at the inventor, and as he turned at the door, said: "Charley, I don't need to wish you luck. Any one who can build such a machine as that can have nothing but luck."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MECHANIC'S VISION.

When Jed Holcomb left the shop the day Charley tested his machine he went sadly to the house; no clear idea of what Charley's determination to move to a larger city meant to him had been reasoned out as yet. He only knew that the young folks were dearer to him than life. As for argument for or against such a move, he had none. He had not been long in the house when Martha noticed his gloomy look.

"Land sakes, Jed!" she exclaimed, "one 'ud think Charley's contraption had blowed up an' scattered things t' th' four winds, t' look at you. What's the matter? Your old liver trouble comin' back? You jist wait right where you be. I'll git th' burdock—Mary wanted t' leave it on th' farm fer that Jake Simpson's shif'less wife t' throw away. Why, Jed, what's the matter with you? I swan if there hain't tears in your eyes."

Jed drew a sleeve furtively across his eyes and sat down with a sigh.

"What'n th' world—" Martha began.

"'Tain't nothin' th' matter of my liver, mother," he answered lamely. "I just found out the children is goin' to pack up an' leave us——"

"W-h-a-t?"

"Yes, mother, Charley is a-plannin' to go to some big city, Chicago most likely, to make a grander machine—tho' what he can want with a better machine than the one he's smashin' to bits out in th' shop is more than I know."

"You don't tell me that boy is a-bustin' that machine to flinders? Jed, hez he gone crazy? That machine hez cost him most five hundred dollars. I'm goin' t' see what he's a-doin'."

"Wait, mother, don't you go," Jed pleaded.

"Don't go your grandmother," was all he heard as Martha started for the shop.

The mechanic was taking measurements with calliper and rule, comparing his findings with the dimensions given on the drawings then under way for the new machine, when Martha entered. There was a catch in her hard old voice as she began: "Charley, Jed says as you are thinkin' of leavin' us?"

Charley looked keenly into her face, and his answer was as gentle as though it had been offered at her knee. "Mother, I've got to go—go somewhere where my machine can have a chance. Besides, I feel that I must get acquainted with men of wider experience in my line before I build my new machine."

"Then Jed was right. You intend to do away with that one?"

"Yes, mother, my work here is finished, and so is the work of this machine. You see it was only built for a day, if it was a success, and it was. Now its work is finished, and out of its clumsy bulk I am going to build the machine I have had in mind for years and years. It's like this, mother: while I had plenty of faith to keep me digging away at it, and a willingness to put all the money I could spare into it, still, there was always a doubt ready to take hold of me as to the thing really being a success. To-day it has proven even more of a success than I had ever hoped the first machine would. To-morrow I can go ahead on the perfected machine without a single fear—and that means better work. No more experiments. Just building for perfection. Don't you see?" he asked, noticing her troubled look.

"No, I don't see. An' what's more, there's a lot of things I won't see—Mary's goin' away, for one thing," and she left him.

That evening, after a supper eaten in silence, the family gathered in the sitting room. Charley's machine lay a wreck in the shop—Martha had satisfied herself on that point.

"Well," Jed observed after a prolonged silence, punctuated by the click of Martha's knitting needles, "seems as tho' there might be a storm to-night, th' way things is brewin'."

"You alludin' t' me, Jed Holcomb?" the wife demanded, dropping her knitting into her lap. "You alludin' t' me?"

"I was a-alludin' t' th' clouds, mother," he protested.

"Well, you'd better allude t' somethin' closer home—with your crazy son-in-law a-hammerin' a thousand dollars' worth of property into flinders, an' a-threatenin' t' take Mary, my Mary, into one of them big towns where there hain't nothin' but dirt, an' sin, an' robbin' an' murder. Jed Holcomb," she shook an accusing finger at her husband, "I swan t' man ef I don't half believe you've bin a-conspirin' with him."

"Mother, I hain't no such thing," Jed protested stoutly.

"You shet right up, Jed Holcomb! They hain't no livin' man can come it over me! Hain't you two bin as close as two born twins ever since Charley come a-courtin' my Mary? An' you've bin thicker'n molasses in January ever since they was married."

"Now, mother, don't you git on no tantrum," Jed implored, while the young folks sat dumb before the rising tide of Martha's wrath.

"Tantrum, tantrum, is it? Well, I'd jist like t' know who wouldn't tantrum? Didn't he promise me he wouldn't take Mary away; an' didn't he promise faithful t' jine th' church? An' t' hear him talk you wouldn't a-thought butter'd melt in his mouth—th' hypocrite! Don't you look at me that way, Jed Holcomb."

"I hain't a-goin' to, mother," he whimpered.

"An' you better not! Hain't you bin a-aidin' an' abettin' him in a-breakin' th' Sabbath? You don't dast t' say you hain't. An' now arter spendin' all his money an' a-livin' here board free for months, an' Mary in th' condition she is, he up an' busts that devil's contraption of his to bits an' says he's goin' t' take my Mary away from me; an' you jist set there a-waggin' your head like a old fool. Jed Holcomb, hain't you got no man in you? Hain't you goin' t' say nothin' ag'in this at all?" Martha's eyes were as hard as diamonds, and tho' her chin trembled, her iron soul held her lips in a firm line.

"Mother, I can't seem t' see no reason in standin'

in Charley's way—an' as fer Mary—why, when I married you, I took you from your mother, didn't I?"

"When you married me! You didn't marry me, Jed Holcomb. I done th' marryin'—an' I could stand alone, an' I've done it all my life—an' my Mary isn't me. She don't know no more how t' stand up fer herself than a newborn baby—an' if she did, she hain't a-goin' to, so there!"

"But, mother," Mary interposed, "if Charley's work must be finished somewhere else——"

"Mary Holcomb Harris, you shet right up—I hain't a-goin' t' quarrel with you, you in the condition you're in—but I will say, that you bein' as soft as putty, that man," pointing a shaking finger at Charley, "could wrap you around his finger; an' after he's lied to me like he has, it's my bounden duty t' protect your everlastin' soul."

"Mother, mother, mother, what's the use of all this," Charley exclaimed, "what's the use of all this? I am willing to admit that I practiced a little harmless deception in order to win your consent to my marrying Mary."

"Well, if I ever," Martha began, but he went on:

"Listen, mother, I loved Mary from the very first time I saw her, and was eating my heart out all the time Bob was going with her. When he came to me and told me how you had investigated him, I determined to win Mary if I could, and in any way I could. I loved her and I wanted her." Leaning over his wife's chair, he put his arms about her and, lifting her face to his, kissed her. Looking up with a smile into the angry face of the mother, he said: "I love her better to-night than ever before, and you must understand me. I do not want to take her away from you until after our baby comes—and I do want you to forgive me—I—I believe I appreciate how you feel——'

"You"—Martha's voice was husky with suppressed anger—"you know how I feel, Charles Harris. Then answer me this: didn't you come into my house like a thief in th' night, a professin' religion an' a dissemblin'?"

"Yes, mother; but I loved Mary."

"Don't you call me mother no more," Martha cried as she started from her chair and shook an accusing finger in his face.

"There, there, mother, do be——'

"Jed Holcomb," she turned upon him squarely, "you listen t' me. This man admits he's lied, an' stole, an' has no religion, an'——"

"But I have a religion," Charley protested, "a religion that sees God in the machine I just destroyed; will see him bigger and better in the one I am to build. Why, I see him in Mary; in the trees and flowers; in the whole world, just as my mother does, and besides——"

"An idolator t' boot!" the mother exclaimed. "Charles Harris, didn't you go down on your knees in my church an' pertend t' pray t' my God? Didn't you ask him, an' me a-list'nin', t' give you a new heart? Answer me that."

"Mother, I protest that it seemed but a form to me. I was not conscious of sinning against God, tho' I was conscious of sinning against you. Let me explain: God to me is infinite, and beyond the power of your church, or any other church, for that matter, to fix the manner of my approach to him, or set the penalty for my shortcomings. My sins of omission and commission against your church may be counted as sins against you who hold to its narrow way. I admit that I deceived you—but I could never have deceived my God. He knew my heart; he knew my struggle; so it comes to this, that I must answer to you for my sinning; I am answering now; I ask you to forgive me. For Mary's sake and the baby, mother, forgive——"

His plea was not to be finished. The iron-souled warrior of the cross lifted her hands on high and prayed: "Lord of mercy an' of wrath, bear me up in what I'm about t' do, an' t' suffer fer thy name's sake. Lord, thou hast put many a burden on me in times past. Whilst I hev halted an' bin a-weary in th' battle, still, O Lord, thou hast strengthened me. Thou hast promised, O Lord, that th' vials of divine wrath shall be emptied on th' heads of idolaters an' heathens, an scoffers t' th' last day. An' Lord, I beseech thee that thou use me, thy unworthy servant, as a chast'nin' rod even

aginst my own flesh an' blood. An' thine be th' glory, amen."

Three auditors had sat in huddled silence, awed by the sincerity, the earnestness, the fervor of Martha's prayer. When she had finished, she stood silent for a moment, then said to Charley: "I have jist one word t' say t' you an' I'm done. Mary stays here till th' baby's born, then she can make up her mind whether she'll go to th' home of a idolater or stay under th' shadow of th' cross of Christ. As fer you—I won't never speak to you agin——"

"Oh, mother, don't say that!" Mary cried out, clasping her mother in her arms, to be pushed away as Martha continued, in her religious ecstasy unmindful of the distress of her daughter. "You can stay here until Mary is through her trouble, or you can go, but from to-night I will never speak t' you agin. Jesus Christ an' my darter is all there is in this world fer me." She turned to leave the room, when Jed appealed to her:

"Mother, you are all worked up over nothin'—won't you say a word of good night t' me,—t' us?" But without a look or word she passed out of the room.

"I shall hate her! Hate her! if she treats you that way," Mary declared when they had gone to their room.

"No, no, sweetheart, you must not, you must not. She may not forgive me, but we must remember some one is coming to live with us in a little while, and we must not hate. We must love our mother; we can do this more when we understand that she suffers as deeply as either of us. She believes I have grossly wronged both her and God, and having that belief, she suffers even more than I do, because I can leave God out of the question between your mother and myself. Yes, girlie, we must love your mother. Our baby shall not come to us bearing the weight of our transgressions. Whatever happens, keep sweet, little wife, keep faith. Your mother is not the Creator. Her anger, even her curses, could not harm us more than we permit by giving way to resentment. From to-night she will have nothing to do with me," he admitted soberly, "but remember, you are not to worry; I will be the same to her as I have been. To-morrow morning bright and early I will go to the city. If I can find what I want in

St. Louis we will go there, if not we will go to Chicago. I did not intend to go for a couple of weeks, but maybe it will be best to go away and give mother a chance to think the whole matter over before she sees too much of me. There, there, girlie, don't cry; the world is not so big that we can get lost in it any more, and if we keep faith and love with us always it will seem but a small place, wherever we live."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNFINISHED CHAPTER.

"Land sakes, Mrs. Norton, an' Elder Smiley, too. Well, I declare, I don't see how you can stand t' be inside sich a mornin' as this, when it's jist fine out here on th' portico." The speaker was none other than our friend Martha Holcomb, who had but that moment arrived on the porch that adorned her nearest neighbor's home on its West street side. In the pleasant south room, the minister had but rid himself of his hat and taken a chair at the window when Martha challenged attention from the porch. That the two in the south room avoided the porch for the very reason that they wished, if possible, to escape a meeting with their co-worker in the vineyard, seems assured.

"When Martha ceased speaking, the minister looked helplessly at his hostess, who shook her head ever so little and called out to her neighbor: "Won't you come in?"

"I certainly shall, 'less you two comes out. Land sakes," she exclaimed, seating herself in one of the wicker porch chairs, "I can't fer th' life of me see what possesses some folks t' stick t' th' insides of their houses till they gets t' lookin' fer all th' world like bleached celery."

The minister sighed and went out on the porch, where he gave Sister Holcomb formal greeting and sat him down.

The Rev. Theodore Smiley was a man of some parts and considerable experience. He had entered the ministry some six years earlier than we make his acquaintance; entered it with a profound faith in the saving grace of conversion. To him, during his first year's ministry, the sinner bowed at the altar asking pardon for past sins, protesting present repentance and promising

future obedience to the mandates of Christ, represented the sum total of all the world might ask of the sinner. This was to him the supreme test of life—a thing sacred, and offered but once in a lifetime—had he not felt "the power" when he went down on his knees and asked that he be allowed to consecrate his life to the service of the Master?

Years spent in ministering to those who had made a like confession, brought to this man a conviction that a wide difference of opinion existed in the minds of the individual members of his church as to what constituted repentance, conversion and sanctification. The joy of service, which in the first months of his ministry had lighted up his face from inward devotional fires, slowly died down when the weight of a neighborhood's past misdeeds, old grudges and fault-findings were dumped at his door and he was asked to assume responsibility for the future conduct of those suspected of past sinnings.

During that first year he firmly believed in sanctification, and preached it. But the family quarrels into which he was dragged by the several factions in the church —each insisting the other was without grace—had been enough to convince him, finally, that, regardless of their prayer-meeting claims, a majority of his flock had fallen far short of the full privilege of religion.

His sermons the second year dealt more with the individual requirements for a sound religious experience, and less with sanctification. It happened that his word-pictures, delineating Christian and non-Christian characteristics in the individual, were said, by a number of his flock, and divers of the unregenerated world, to "hit at" some of the pillars of his church. Those who were said to be "hit at" gave weight to the gossip by evincing unrest while under the voice of the pastor. It is needless to say the "pillars" openly questioned the minister's right to subject the saved to criticism, while the unsaved world numbered its millions of souls on the way to hell. The pastor was so wrapped up in his work that the seeds of internal strife had gone far toward germination before he discovered where they had taken root. Sadly enough he gave up the individual and preached all the way from "The First Sin" to "The Saving Blood of Jesus," and found to his surprise, a

vastly different attitude in the "pillars," both toward him personally, and toward the contribution baskets.

With the coming of his third year he began to deal with social problems. His sermons bristled with facts and figures in support of the text. Remembering the failure of sanctification and his later appeal to the individual, he poured into his new sermons all the accumulated knowledge of his past experience, and encountered a stronger opposing force than ever before. When accused of taking politics into his pulpit, of dragging business into his sermons, he became indignant and protested that if politics and business did not square with religion it was his plain duty to teach his flock to avoid that sort of politics and business. The attitude of the minister resulted in the appointment of a committee from the board of trustees to wait upon the pastor in the interests of the church government, and insist upon "the simple gospel of Christ" (?) being preached from their pulpit.

The pastor requested this committee to put its objections in writing, also outline the course it wished him to follow in the future. With evident reluctance the committee agreed to meet the minister's wishes. A banker, a business man, and a retired farmer composed the committee. The minister read the indictment carefully, studied the recommendations of the committee to the last detail, then announced that he would take their offering as his text for the next Sunday evening's sermon, after which the membership should decide as to the future.

That sermon will never be forgotten by some who heard it. Into it the young minister poured a wealth of pathetic pleading for a free pulpit. He defended his faith in sanctification as the only true base upon which to build the superstructure of religious life. He demanded that he be permitted to denounce individual shortcomings, social sins, political and business dishonor—without let or hindrance. He demanded this as his right, and in the name of his Master protested against the limitations sought to be put upon the free gospel, as he taught it.

As might have been expected the church divided. The thing that most surprised the minister was the

numerical insignificance of the party which stood by him in this crisis in his ministry. When he had asked God's blessing to rest upon his congregation after the sermon, and stood waiting beside the pulpit, confident that even the committee had not been able to withstand the sublime truth, the eloquence, the logic of his appeal for a free pulpit, his heart saddened as he noticed the drawing together of "the pillars of the church," first in twos and threes, then in a larger body, the center of which was the committee. As his eyes traveled over the heads of a congregation which seemed to have forgotten him in its hurry to discuss the sermon, he saw coming down a side aisle a dozen of the poorer members of the church. They had hesitated until the "pillars" had been given time to have a first word and handclasp with the minister, but seeing the more prosperous members intent upon affairs other than handclasps, the bolder of the rear pew holders proposed that those about him who believed as the minister did should show their confidence in him by going forward and publicly expressing their approval. Following them came a straggling delegation of the rag-tag element—laborers, workers' wives, and a few strangers who had attended because they had understood there was to be trouble.

The minister watched them as they approached, and his heart filled—were the many doubts that had assailed him as his church closed one after another the great gates of truth against him to be affirmed? Had the world come again so close to the days of Calvary that only the poor would hear Christ's message gladly?

There could be no mistaking the warmth of approval voiced by those who came to congratulate him upon his splendid defense of the gospel of righteousness. But he saw a sneer on the lips of the banker as he, too, noted the character of those who grasped the minister's hand. Reluctantly, a few of the more indifferent of the congregation left the church. A handful of those who did not dare to be among the first to go to the minister, finally went up to offer advice, criticism and caution, but the "pillars" stood firm.

After a whispered conference between members of the board, the banker passed the minister without a word

'A handful * * * finally went up to offer advice, criticism and caution, but the 'PILLARS' stood firm."—Page 102.

and from the pulpit called for order. The pastor and all within the church sat down.

"Brothers and sisters," the banker began, "some time ago the trustees by vote selected a committee to meet with our pastor and lay certain matters before him. He asked that we present these matters in writing, and also map out the course we desired him to pursue in the discharge of his duties as pastor of this church. I do not like to be personal, least of all in church matters (Deacon Cannon voiced a loud 'amen'), but I must say I believe the pastor has shamefully abused his privilege in the pulpit of this church—and I voice the sentiments of the trustees," he hastened to add. "He has abused the privileges of this pulpit in refusing to make answer to our committee after it had complied with his request; in taking our charges and recommendations as a text for what he has been pleased to call a sermon; in openly attacking the committee; in attempting to make it appear that the board of trustees has been animated by other than the highest Christian motives in its effort to keep this pulpit free from sensationalism, and unwarranted attacks upon some of our most respected citizens. Feeling that we are justified in making these charges, and that the cause of true Christianity demands that the officers immediately take steps to prevent strife and division in the church, the trustees have asked that I announce a meeting of the membership for next Tuesday evening, at which meeting the trustees will present certain recommendations relative to the matter I have been discussing——" The banker hesitating, at a loss how to close, turned, his eyes lit upon Deacon Cannon, a hard-fisted old money grubber who had been at war with the minister from the first because he failed to get enough hell-fire for sinners into his ministry.

"Will Deacon Cannon lead us in prayer?" the banker asked, and slid to his knees behind the pulpit.

Deacon Cannon sat blinking his little eyes toward the pulpit long after the members had assumed the prescribed attitude of prayer. So lost was this good man in contemplation of a final victory over the minister that a second call from the pulpit was necessary to put him in touch with the thing required of him.

Deacon Cannon's enemies contended that he poured all his religion out in prayers on a Sunday and filled up the hollow with mortgages and shaved notes on week days. However that may be, the prayer he sent up that night broke all records he had established before.

"Good Lord," he prayed, "Lord of all, Great Father in Heaven, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive this young man. O Lord, he has come near to a-calling me a whitened seplicker, but I forgive him. And O Lord, I implore thee to do the same. O Lord, I feel that I am a weak sinner wandering in a vale of tears, and thou knowest, O Lord, how often my pathway is beset by temptations. O Lord, thou knowest that if man had not bin born to sin, Christ thy son would not have suffered and died, and we would 'uv all bin lost in the lake of fire. O Lord, we thank thee that the way is hard, and invite thy divine compassion to fall upon the head of this erring young minister, like manner out of the skies. May his heart be touched with divine grace. May he see the errer of his ways, and may we, O Lord, Brother Baxter, Brother Mann and your humble servant, be endowed with power from on high, as we try to lead him to see the errer of his ways. And if he won't see it, O Lord, may we be armed with the strength of angels, and be en—en—enabled, O Lord, to scourge him forth from thy holy temple. May we be filled with thy spirit, O Lord! And do, Dear Jesus, come down in power and lead aright them who has given comfort to this young man to-night. May they be brought to see how he has gone against the authority of the officers of this, thy church. O Lord Jesus, give them as aid and abet him a newness of heart that shall bring them to see the errer of their ways. An' now, Lord, bless us as we go to our several homes. We ask it all for Jesus' sake, amen."

"Amen, and again amen." It was the minister's voice, heard to the farthest corners of the church, and Deacon Cannon blinked again.

At the Tuesday meeting it was proven that the Lord was with the trustees. The minister refusing to yield, the officers of the church declared the pulpit vacant. On vote of the church, Deacons Cannon and Baxter were selected as a safe committee to go into distant places

in search of a "safe" minister. News of Rev. Mr. Smiley's sermons on "Our Social Sins," had reached a certain church in a certain city, at that time undergoing periodic regeneration. An opportune call came for him to assist in a great union meeting of the churches, that for the hundredth time had determined finally to drive the devil and all his works from the community. He so pleased his audiences with his attacks on Gambling, Prostitution, and the Saloon that he was called to fill the pulpit of the First Baptist Church. When he had accepted and for the first time stood behind the pulpit in a magnificent church as its regular pastor, he wondered if after all Deacons Cannon and Mann and Baxter were not agents in the hands of God to help him on his way by giving him the spur of their opposition. As he looked out over a congregation that filled the church, as a compliment to the "new" minister, he felt that there was still hope that he might preach the full message he believed Christ had delivered to the world.

Before accepting the call to this church he had felt that there was a work well worth while before him. The city, tiring of the rottenness of its political machinery, in an all-too-evident partnership with vice and crime, had decided to clean house. On this wave of proposed civic righteousness he had entered upon his ministry, and gave valuable assistance to the politicians who had fallen out with the machine and were now struggling for a clean city under a business administration. His pulpit, from that first morning when we left him looking out over a splendid audience, rang with condemnation of all social sins. The reformed politicians, out of office and hungry to get in, exploited every attack against crime, graft, vice and the incompetency of public officials, whether it came from the new preacher's pulpit or some other voicing protest against wrongdoing, as a direct charge against the then office-holders. A moral spasm epidemic in the city, coupled with adroit campaigning, won a majority of the votes and gave the city a clean administration, pledged to put all gamblers, porchclimbers, holdup men and prostitutes out of business in short order. All this happened within three months after the new minister began his labors. For

three more long, strenuously-used months he kept at the heels of the newly-elected officials, demanding that they redeem their pledges, and all the while kept hammering social sins from his pulpit. Within another three months he was given to understand that the men who had been elected to carry out the will of God in a city's government were simply a new line-up of old machine hands, and were in no immediate hurry to crush any one of three very profitable vice trusts. In fact, after the excitement had died down, and the new machine had gotten well under way in the city hall, several of his substantial members had cautioned him against carrying his crusade to extremes. So long as he merely tickled the ears of his congregation with a general condemnation of vice, as he had done prior to the election, all went well; but since that time he had been asking more than a liberal contribution to the fund for the uplift of fallen women, general charities, etc., etc. When he had discovered that neither the city government nor the individual Christians who had been so much in evidence before election proposed to do anything personally to blot out the crimes complained of, he, with two young men who believed as he did, that to destroy crime one must go to its source, instead of taking the more popular way of treating the symptoms while trying to "resolve" the criminal into the mood to destroy the thing that fed him, disguised themselves, sought the under world, and in one short month uncovered so much filth, reaching from the city hall to the lowest dens of vice, that they were simply staggered at the complexity of the system and the boldness of its operators.

In his study the new minister went carefully over the ground with the young men who had been with him in his wanderings. He told them of his past experiences when attempting to bring individual sins home to church members. He pointed out the many difficulties that lay before them should they decide to use the evidence they had gathered in an open fight on the foundations of vice. They were young, had just came out of their first political struggle, were joying in the thought that they had busted a machine, and were hungry for more of the battle. So the minister took courage from their enthusiasm, when they insisted that he would carry the

church by storm and compel others to take up the fight.

They had discovered that three of the members of their church owned property in the "red-light district" and received more rent from this property than property of a like value would bring them in the respectable parts of the city. The minister took these facts direct to the members involved and told them plainly that he was preparing to enter upon a campaign against those who upheld the vice of their city and advised them to get rid of their tenants. One good brother lied to him. A second dodged the issue the first time it was presented, made another date with the crusader and failed to keep it. The third man solemnly affirmed that he had never suspected the nature of his tenants—all that was in the hands of his agents, he insisted; then hesitated a long time when the minister asked him for the name of his agent. For a week the pastor and his young lieutenants worked like beavers to get at the bottom of the cases that affected the several church members. The agent of the last brother interviewed laughed in the preacher's face when the latter chided him for accepting such lease-holders to the everlasting shame of a Christian landlord.

"Did Mr. Hooker tell you he didn't know what sort of cattle he rented that property to?" the agent demanded.

"Certainly—what else could he say?" the preacher asked in a puzzled voice.

"He could have told the truth, if he hasn't forgotten how," the other retorted.

"My dear sir, you don't mean to——"

"I mean to say that Hooker insisted upon leasing that property to those people against my strong protest."

"But why should he?"

"Why should he? Say, Mr. Smiley, you are too good to live in this sinful world. Why don't you ask me how old is Ann, or something hard?"

"But I am in earnest," the minister insisted, "and I asked you that question in all seriousness."

The real estate man lost his smile right there, and cudgeled his mind for an answer that would satisfy a preacher in earnest, and still not harm a good patron.

However, he did not find the answer, and as the minister pressed him, reasserting that Mr. Hooker had declared that he, the agent, was entirely at fault, the answer came.

"You tell Old Hooker he's a liar. I wanted to fire that scum the first of the year, but he wouldn't stand for it. They pay more for the place than any one else could afford to pay, and Hooker will never see enough pennies until the devil sets him counting them, so he insists that I rent the property to the old tenants, but says I've got to put up the rents. He knows they will pay rather than get out and hunt another landlord. When he says I rent any property to such cattle without orders from the owner he lies. I may not pass a plate in church, as he does, but, by God, I'm decent."

The minister went straight to Brother Hooker's office and laid the agent's reply before him. Hooker flushed up, stammered, coughed, squinted his little black eyes at the young fool and made up his mind to have it over with as soon as possible.

"Ahem, Mr. Smiley, ahem,—what do we pay you to do, may I ask?"

"Preach the gospel of Jesus," came the answer.

"Yes, yes, that's it, preach the gospel," he rubbed his hands slowly. "Does that include the running of your members' private business?" he asked sweetly.

"No, it does not, and I have never undertaken any such task."

"Exactly; then pray tell me under what head your visit to my agent comes, if it does not come under the head of interfering in my private business?" Mr. Hooker's voice had grown some between the beginning and end of his question.

"It comes under the head of a church trial, unless you give me your word of honor that you will put those people out at once." Smiley was angry at Hooker for having lied to him in the beginning, and now that he was fairly trapped wanting to play the same old Baxter dodge on him.

"Church trial!" Hooker exploded. "Why, you young, young thingemaderry. I built that church. Church trial! If you talk that sort of rot for a week we'll have to take you by the heels——"

"I said church trial, and I meant it."

"And I say, not in my church! Young man, you're crazy! Too much prominence has turned your head, and my advice to you is to drop this business you've been monkeying with and stick straight to the gospel, if you don't——"

"If I don't?" Smiley was white and biting his lips.

"If you don't, you can hunt another church. And God pity them," he added as an afterthought.

"I want just one more word, Brother Hooker, just one; if I have word from your agent that he has orders to put those people out before next Sabbath, I will drop your case. If that word does not come, I shall lay the whole sickening, disgusting story before the membership and they will decide between us. Good morning."

For a week the minister labored over his sermon on the foundations of vice, then submitted it to the two staunch friends. They approved it, and he delivered it to a packed church.

When the storm broke the pastor stood to his guns and demanded that the members found to be profiting from rentals received from dens of iniquity either dispose of the property or leave the church. Once more he stood in the presence of a divided church, and in this crisis had less of a following than before, and that in a far larger congregation.

A committee chosen from the body of members met to frame up a set of resolutions for the guidance of the pastor, and reported that as each man had to be saved individually it was out of the province of the church to undertake the regulation of the individual's business affairs; they also resolved that it was beneath the dignity of their pastor to go about among the places he had admitted visiting; thus balancing one shortcoming against another, they further resolved to drop all proceedings against erring members and an equally erring pastor, provided the members accused would be careful in renting their properties in future, and he would agree not to disturb the situation by probing it deeper than a platitudinous sermon would reach. They insisted that they had elected officials to look after the morals of the city. They, the citizens, paid the officials

to do their duty. If they refused, the highest, in fact, the only consistent duty of the church was to resolve and pray. Finally, their report insisted that the church had hired Rev. Theo. Smiley to preach; it being the sense of the committee that he should confine his labors to that, and to the distribution of the no inconsiderable charity of the church.

The minister asked to be allowed to preach just one more sermon in their splendid church, when he had heard the report read; just one, he pleaded, then they might seek another pastor. A wordy war followed this appeal, and finally victory came to the few followers of the pastor because they were insistent that he be heard as against the report of the committee.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHAPTER FINISHED.

The last sermon the Rev. Mr. Smiley preached before the congregation in M——, endeared him to the few loyal souls who wanted more than platitudinous dissertations delivered in lieu of straight-from-the-shoulder condemnation of unrighteousness. And it goes without saying that Elder Hooker's followers were also well satisfied with the sermon; it aided them materially in shaping up their defense against sensationalism in the pulpit. The good people of the church in D—— were, to quote an evangelist, "preparing to fight the devil with fire." And as they expected to corner his satanic majesty in the saloon, the Rev. Mr. Smiley was called to fill the pulpit of another First Baptist church and assist in feeding the fires in their crusade.

Martha Holcomb had been a very dissatisfied member since moving to the city.

"Now, that I've got you, Elder," Martha began, as the doctor's wife and the minister were seated on the front porch, "I want to know what you think of the actions of them young men last Sunday evening?" The doctor's wife smiled at a porch post and the minister looked his embarrassment.

"Really, Sister Holcomb, I did not attach much importance to their behavior. I certainly——"

"You didn't, and you a ordained minister! Well, I don't much wonder. It seems I sensed it, an' that's why I came over here when I saw you had stopped. Now, I'd like to know if you set much importance on th' way your church has ignored my labors since I jined?" Martha squared herself for the conflict, well satisfied that the minister's defense would be equally weak in this case.

"Well, Sister Holcomb, I would like to know two

things before I answer: what you complain of; then, what you expect."

"I complain of bein' set down on, right from the start." Her voice grew harsh, as she remembered the many slights a would-be fashionable congregation had put upon her. "I want you to know that I allus, from the day I jined father's church, was one of the leadin' members, an' when I come to your church I expected to take up my work in the vineyard just where I left off in t'other church; but the only thing I git is giggles and titters from the young things, and a cool 'How de do' from the rest. Talk about Christian spirit, why, when I jist offered to shake hands with Judge Jackson's wife an' asked her how all her folks was, she jist glared at me an' never offered me her hand. An' two or three of them young woman's Christian business things as was a-standin' around jist giggled out loud. An' what sort of a thing is that young woman's business anyway, a-sendin' a lot of young girls an' old maids in a-swimmin', an' a-fightin' with swords an' a-playin' all sorts of card games an' no mothers to look arter them? I call it scandalous."

"But, my dear sister, the Y. W. C. A. has a most discreet and efficient manager in Mrs. Jefferson."

"Mrs. Jefferson is discreet, is she? Well, all I've got to say is, that, from what I hev seen of her, she's one of the friskiest widders I ever see, an' it's scandalous the way she behaves when that secretary of the young men's business is around." The minister laughed. "I allowed you'd laugh, but you can't make me believe any good comes of puttin' a passel of girls into rooms like them with a frisky widder woman, who ain't lookin' arter herself properly, to look arter them. An' when it comes to the young fellers a-boxin' each other's heads off, an' a-playin' billiards an' pool, an' football, an' baseball, an' doin' sich things as that, an' callin' it religion, why, it jist shows me how little real religion they is nowadays."

"You don't mean to imply that you are opposed to the Y. M. C. A. and the Y. W. C. A.?"

"Yes, I do. Them boys is a-learnin' to play games, an' when they git out in the world they're a-goin' t' th' saloons and sich places to find them; an' you know that

a lot of young fellers that goes into the Y. M. C. A. hain't got no call to be called anything but young heathens, an' when it comes to lookin' close, the other end of this business ain't much better. Ain't there been a robbery an' two other suspicious cases in th' buildin' this year?"

"Yes, but that's no more a charge against the Association than the backsliding of a member is chargeable against the church," Mr. Smiley replied gently.

"No, I reckon not, when the minister preaches nothin' but milk an' honey an' a forgivin' God. You ain't preached but two good sermons since I bin in the church, an' they won't let you preach another in a hurry. My father preached an' preached the gospel, an' I ain't heard it preached but once since he died. An' I want to say, that we had a real live church. They wasn't none of your flimadiddle clubs an' classes, an' associations, an' they wasn't no suicides an' robbin', an' when a member backslid he backslid plum into the lake of brimstone, an' he didn't have no bouquets to take along, either. When I ask about anything in your church, any work that ought to be done, I'm jist informed in so many words that it's in the hands of this committee or that one, and they're sure to do it better'n I could. An' so, along with havin' preached hell out of the church, an' goin' into partnership with the Idolaters an' a hobnobbin' with Catholics, Unitarians an' Universalites an' sich trash, an' a-goin' in fer all sorts of clubs an' things an' a-takin' the work of the church out of the hands of the members, it jist seems to me that they ain't no sanctification no more. Why, jist last Sunday I see three women I hadn't noticed afore, a-takin' the Lord's Supper, an' after meetin' I went to them an' tried to git acquainted as a Christian ought to when strangers come to the house of the Lord; an' what do you s'pose I heard that beautiful guardian of young girls, your dear Mrs. Jefferson, a-whisperin' to the fust one, as soon as I'd turned my back? Well, she giggled an' said: 'Oh, that's Mrs. Holcomb. She's our cross from the country.' Then both of 'em giggled, an' the secretary of the young men's business, he up an' ast them, 'Did they hear me in the Bible class?' an' they all laughed. Now, I tried to do my Christian duty by them women, who I

reckon are some more guardians over young girls, an' they all jist stared at me; an' their hands, when I did git hold of them, was like dead fish, an' their eyes didn't have a spark of soul in 'em. An' talkin' about that Bible class—I got so tired of them a-dodgin' th' plain written words about hell an' eternal punishment an' a-makin' light of all the things Christ taught about Christian duty an' the crosses one has to bear in this here world that I got plumb disgusted with the whole passel. They hain't nothin' but jist a nice little debatin' society, an' almighty careful what they debate about, at that. So I jist made up my mind, when I found hell mentioned right out in the lesson fer last Sunday, that they wouldn't git a chance to dodge it that time, an' they didn't. An' then to have that class of young fellers laugh out loud, when I told Old Lockhard the Lord would singe his old goat whiskers for him, 'cause he said 'they wasn't any call to talk about a hell hereafter, when they could git a smell of it every Sunday right in church,' or I'd miss my guess. I jist said then the first time I set eyes on Elder Smiley I'm goin' to ask him to preach from the text, 'An' th' wicked shall be consumed in a lake of burnin' fire;' and I want you to, will you do it?"

Martha leaned forward and eyed her pastor, her face expressing a doubt as to his willingness to commit himself, in face of what she considered the infidelity of his members.

"Do you insist upon this wording of my text?" he inquired.

"Them are the words as I hev carried them in my heart all the years I bin in the church. An' if I didn't believe them, I could be jist as milk and watery, jist as unconcerned as the rest of your members. Believin' them words, I hev gone aginst my own flesh an' blood, an' suffered, an' suffered, an' sanctified my life. An' I won't be set down on by no infidels in a church, when I spurn the infidels in my own home. Are you a-goin' to preach that sermon?"

The minister looked at her hard-lined face, scarred deep in the battle of years.

"Yes, sister," he answered, "I will. I may not be

able to meet your approval, but I shall preach from your text."

"Land alive!" Martha arose, shading her eyes with her hand. "There's Jed Holcomb back, as sure as I live. Well, I must be a-going home; I'm much obliged to you, Elder, an' I shall pray that you git help to make that sermon fit your congregation."

When Martha had gone the two sat in silence for a time.

"She is impossible," the woman remarked.

"Like many of us," the minister answered. Then he told the doctor's wife of his early struggles in the ministry. This woman had been a second mother to him, and to-day, with the complaints of a congregation in mind, it seemed good to unburden his heart to her.

"I feel like preaching hell-fire, and I wish I believed it as literally as does Mrs. Holcomb."

They looked across at the home where Jed and Mary had just met upon the walk in front of the house.

"Oh, no, you don't," the woman insisted. "All the troubles of the church, and Sister Holcomb's troubles on top of them, have upset you. You'll be all right in a week."

"I don't know," he declared. "It seems as though everything is slipping away from me; even my sanctification."

"Never mind that," the woman laughed; "just keep the milk and honey; Sister Holcomb has enough sanctification to supply the city."

CHAPTER XVI.

A WHITE SLAVE TRADER.

Fagan's place is not pretentious, consisting as it does of three "flats" and one of those grim-faced grogshops that grow, fungus-like, in portions of our cities given over to the poverty-cursed of many lands, the old-clothes man, second-hand shoe stores, rag shops, and brothels.

Fagan is entitled to another name, but at this moment it matters not; the name she bears fits as well to her calling as did that of the old London Jew to his. However, we know how she came to be christened "Fagan" amongst the thugs, short-time men, card sharps, pimps and pikers of her world. Before she discovered the all-power that rested in "seeing" the elected guardians of public morals when in trouble, she had been arrested so often upon the charge of running a "fence" for child thieves (and older ones probably brought her a goodly share of their loot) that she came rightly by her title. And it stuck, even after she took up the more aristocratic business of furnishing girls to discriminating customers; also to the other slave pens in the pool.

One of her shining satellites, "Slick" Snively, is never seen at Fagan's, yet he is in her employ occasionally, and is one of the best decoys in the business. He is young, good looking, and as yet able physically to ward off those telltale marks of dissipation which will begin to show upon him in a year or two; then good-by to the job that brings him an easy living to-day. From there to the end of life's chapter his lot will be cast with the semi-criminal class which feeds upon both criminal and respectable alike. At this time Snively has no thought of the end. In the full glory of his power and patronage he sees a golden future stretching away before him. A future filled with women and horses, and he playing both for the limit.

It is only necessary that the quarry be pointed out to

"Slick" and the reward offered for her capture sufficient to arouse his cupidity, for him to labor incessantly to accomplish his ends. What sort of labor is this? Well, for the open market "Slick" inserts a "want ad" in one or more of our daily newspapers that reads like this:

"Wanted—At once, young women of good appearance—under twenty preferred—light work, steady employment and refined surroundings. Pay liberal, and sure promotion. Z 42."

To all who answer, a letter is sent upon stationery purporting to have come from a suit, cloak and furnishing house, in need of models, fitters, salesladies, etc., etc. The writer requests the applicant to send a photo, state age, height, weight, etc. If all questions are answered to the satisfaction of "Slick," he writes these daughters of labor to meet him at a given address, or that they will be met by a lady agent of the concern, if they live in the city. If they have been lured from small country towns or farm homes, once in "Slick's" clutches their fate is sealed. Both Fagan and her agent like the country-grown article of merchandise better than the city product, and are always on the lookout for what "Slick" jocularly dubs "Fresh Country Butter."

A plump little roll of "Fresh Country Butter" once safely landed in the city would be taken either direct from the depot, or from one of Fagan's arranged places of rendezvous, with her luggage, a loving mother's last kiss, a father's "God bless you, little girl," or a brother's "Good luck, and lots of it, little sister," still lingering with her mid the confusing bustle of the city's surging life, to a place Fagan has selected for her latest "white slave." A place where all her pleas for mercy are thrown back into her crimsoned face by rough brutes clothed as men, and women who have had all of womanhood burned out of them in a worse than hell's fire. A place where she must yield her virtue within a given time or go naked. If nakedness will not "cure" her, starvation follows. Should she withstand torture and still refuse to yield her body for Fagan's profit, this daughter of the people, this child of labor, seeking only the means to life in food, clothing and shelter, must in the end submit to the ordeal that in our southland costs the perpetrator his life at the stake. Shocked? Can

this be true? Why not? Your whole system of prostitution is based and grounded in the profit system. If this girl dies, Fagan loses the dollars it has cost her to gain possession of the girl's body. "Slick" must be paid. The officials of a Christian city must be "sugared." I assure you the raping of innocence is but an incident in the lives of those who operate our White Slave Pens in Christian America.

Other means are used to bring victims to Fagan's. Other want ads are inserted in our papers. Other agents beside "Slick" take commission. When Fagan has a customer who wants a certain mill or shop girl whose ruin he could not accomplish, "Slick" has been put upon the scent, and by hook or crook, be it weeks or months in working out, he secures the girl's confidence and finally gets her to accompany him to a place where she can be "handled" without fear of interference. Then, when she is safely housed, and ready to surrender, the man who sought her ruin in the first place appears as a "savior" and shows her *the only way out.*

But one scene in our story is laid at Fagan's. But one of the growing "army of white slaves" plays a part in the unfoldment of our tale, and this is the manner in which the victim was lured into the net. But wait, let us first enter the home of the Widow Davis in the little village of Longs Point, and make the acquaintance of the family.

"Oh, mother, I've just got an answer to the letter I wrote Mr. Johnson, and they want me to come next Monday, sure. Think of it! I'm to have fifteen dollars a week at the very start, and more in just a little while." The speaker, a bright-faced girl of eighteen, threw herself into her mother's arms and, patting the older woman's cheeks, protested, "Now, mother, wasn't you a goose to object to my sending my photo to them? You may read it yourself—they say they especially need just such a figure for a model to exhibit all kinds of fine gowns and cloaks to their stylish customers. My, won't it be jolly? For once in my life I am going to have more clothes on my back than I can ever wear out." Her joyous laugh and the low sobbing of the mother sounded together for a moment after the girl had ceased

speaking; then the mother, drying her eyes on a corner of her apron, looked up and tried bravely to smile through unshed tears, as she said:

"I don't want to even seem unselfish, Estella, but I do hate to have you go—not only because we will miss you so, but there's so many pitfalls in the big cities, child; so many. You have been all your life in this quiet little town, and I've tried hard to keep a home roof, and the three of us together——"

"Mother, dear," the girl interrupted, her eyes filling, "you are not going to lose me. I'm not going to the jumping-off place; and I'm not going to get hung, murdered, or drowned; I'm just going to try my wings. Why, I'll be all of eighteen whole years old in a month, and if you say so I will come home then, just to show you how groundless your fears and suspicions have been, and how much of a woman I am grown to be in the city in one little month."

"But Stella, don't you think it would be well to give this letter to our minister and have him investigate and see if this firm is really respectable? I've heard some awful stories about the way they treat girls in some of those places."

"Why, mother, that would take weeks and weeks. Besides, here's their letterhead," she took the letter in question from her mother's trembling hand, "not just a printed one, you see, but—well, anyway, I don't know what they call it, but you can see it's expensive, and you don't suppose they'd go to all that trouble if they were not in business? Besides, they say, 'Our reliability is attested by the record of our sales last year, amounting to above five hunderd thousand dollars.' And then they want me next Monday——"

"The minister could go in," the mother began.

"How you talk, mother. Just as though a big firm like that would want to keep a place waiting for a little country girl while ministers or any one else nosed around asking if they were respectable." Throwing her arms about her mother, she concluded: 'Not another word, mother mine, not one more tiny little word. I wrote them before I came up from the store."

The mother's voice was muffled as she answered from the girl's shoulder. "It ought not to be so hard

for me to let you go, dear heart, for you are a good girl, and can take care of yourself, and I suppose I shouldn't make objections when I know you always do the very best you can for me—and, and Stella, I can trust you anywhere to love God and live right, can't I?"

"Yes, mother, always," with a kiss. "There, there, run out into the kitchen. Ann is coming, and I want to surprise her all by myself. That's a good mother."

Mrs. Davis had but left the room when her eldest daughter, an overworked teacher in the town school, came in and threw herself into the nearest chair.

"I declare, I am just fagged out. Why, Stell, what's this?" She had taken the letter from her sister's hand at the moment she sat down, but had been so absorbed in her own troubles that her mind had not grasped what her eyes saw upon the paper. After that first questioning, "what is this?" she did not lift her eyes from the letter until it had been read to the end.

"Fifteen dollars per week, Stella? And nothing to do but try on clothes. Say, Stell, just try and get me a job there." She looked up at the radiant girl and tried to put on a brave face, even tho' the tears were close. "You with your plump figure, togged out in a thousand-dollar gown, could have me, or what's left of me, after eight years' fighting with an average of forty-eight boys for nine months out of each year, stand beside you in my bones, and Miss Botcher's dress fitting —why, it would be immense!" Both girls laughed as they thought of the dressmaker whose name fitted so well, then Ann went on seriously: "Stell, you think it over, and tell your head window trimmer about it; he could paint a sign, "Before and After Wearing Our Gowns," and hang it up over us. We are near enough alike in features to pass—say, Stell, you must get me a job."

"Mother's afraid to let me go," Estella began, when Ann, forgetting her fatigue, sprang from the chair and almost took her sister from her feet as she caught and kissed her. "Afraid to let you go?" she repeated. "Of course she's afraid to let you go—why, she used to be afraid to let me go out and close the yard gate after dark, and that isn't so long ago, either. But you go. Don't stay in this town and be buried before you

die. Look at me, Stell—I was just as pretty and plump as you are, at your age; and I'm worked to death at twenty-five, and no one seems to care any more." With quivering lips and eyes filled with tears the teacher looked into her young sister's bright face, and, pluckily putting self behind her, went on: "Don't miss your chance to go where people live; it may never come again —I'll do my best to keep mother in good spirits."

"Oh, Ann, you are so good!" Estella whispered; "you are good to both of us—and honestly, Ann, I am not at all anxious for myself; I, too, want to help keep this little home for mother."

That evening after consulting time tables the widow's daughters sent a message to the city stating that Estella Davis would arrive at the Grand Central depot at four o'clock the afternoon of the next Sunday.

CHAPTER XVII.

MADAME VAUGHN'S AND THE EAGLE CLUB.

In an old red brick mansion, gray stone trimmed, set well back in shaded grounds on one of the respectable thoroughfares of the metropolis wherein the tragedy of this tale unfolds, there is high revel to-night. Madame Vaughn and her daughters (by adoption) and nieces *pro tanto,* who have their automobile, carriage, trap, and liveried attendants, are enjoying a prosperous season.

Once upon a time—a time held green in the memory of staid business men, and mothers of other mothers—this old red brick mansion was new. Within its welcoming portals tripped the youth and beauty of a city growing to the years of accountability. There was then laughter and song within these walls—children's happy voices—and the echoes of scampering little feet, filled out the measure of harmony.

But hold! Is there not laughter and song to-night? Yes, they are laughing—but such laughter! Those who make it have forgotten how to make laughter—that sweet bubbling over of pure joy. But they are singing. Yes, surely Madame Vaughn's daughters and nieces sing. Listen to the ribald words, rude flung from lips that have lost the perfume of youth's sweet flowers—music wrung in ragtime from the lips of women who each day sink lower and still lower into the yawning quagmire of vice, and cease to struggle, even while there is hope of rescue, for struggling means remembrance, and to them, the great majority of them, remembrance is as a death's-head at a feast.

Madame Vaughn's old red brick mansion, with its gray stone trimmings, this night, all nights, knows both song and laughter, if you are satisfied to so name the sounds we hear in passing. Within the portals of this old mansion "the better element" of our citizenship pass and repass. No Hooligan or harlot from the street; no

common laborer or factory girl on the downward way may pass the gilded, guarded portals of this great establishment, where the cheapest room rents for twenty dollars per night, while the best accommodations the house affords, with Madame's sweet-scented presence in attendance, at the minimum, costs one hundred dollars. No, this old red brick mansion is not a brothel—it is worse! Here those who pose and preach, and hold themselves above the common life, meet to do to death the social virtues of our time.

We will enter. Are you safely past the doorkeeper? Then follow me to the parlor. Once upon a time the portraits of men and women who had served their country and their families with equal honor adorned these walls. Look you! They have been replaced by works of art depicting God's fairest gift to earth naked and not ashamed. This floor was covered once upon a time with a carpet hallowed by the tread of women whose passions were sanctified in the lives of prattling babies. See, in the corner there; a dark stain is peeping from underneath that rug with a border of lilies of the valley. Just the other night a young man, seeking the depths of life's cup of madness, found a sister in the woman they would have put into his polluted arms. Their mingled blood ate deep into the sturdy oak. Yes, they washed and washed again, but this stain, like the social sin from which it had birth, may not be washed away—the very flooring must be torn out.

See those bronzes? Behold the priceless marbles, mirrors, and other splendid furnishings. Look well! To pay for each adornment within these naked walls women have wept countless tears, both here and in ruined homes. Souls have shriveled, and bodies have been consumed in an agony of pain known only to those damned souls who have visited the bottom of Hell's deepest cave. Look about you and ponder well. This old red brick mansion is but a type. In this broad land, for each church spire pointing toward the blue, there stands a "Madame Vaughn's," and this curse is being fastened more firmly each day upon us, while the pus from this social ulcer wells up and flows into respectable homes over the doorsills dedicated to the sanctity of virtue and family honor.

But let us be going. On a Sunday night in the future, as the chimes ring out the hour of worship from an hundred church towers, we shall return. Then you shall look upon an animated picture; and as you look, your very heart shall sob and your soul cry out that this cup, too, may pass from the lips of innocence.

The Eagle Club is housed in a most pretentious structure. As I have gazed upon it from over the way, I have not wondered that many of our good citizens, who fall below its requirements in the matter of any one or more of the requisites to membership—a goodly bank account, a well-tested political pull, and last, but not least, a way of finding easy money—feel envious, yet withal are proud that WE have such a magnificent club building and Club within our city.

Certainly, there are other Clubs, and some of them quite pretentious, but the "Eagle," like that old red brick mansion, gray stone trimmed, easily stands at the head. What the saloon of our political ward-heeler "Bat" is to the brothel, the "Eagle" and its brood is to such establishments as that of Madame Vaughn.

See how imposing is its massive granite front. Supporting the beautiful cornice of winged Cupids, those splendid monoliths give one the impression of superstrength. Behold its great plate windows flanked by iron, tortured by the cunning hand of skilled workmen into marvelous creations—flowers and leaves, and curving, twisting, curling threads of drawn metal. See those great doors? As they hang loaded with a wealth of bronze trimmings they each cost a prince's ransom.

Behind all this outward show of strength and beauty there is a prodigality of wealth—a riot of luxurious appointment, and menial service par excellence. If you but have the "front" necessary to gain admittance to the Eagle Club, an hundred doors open to your need of asylum. Within these walls you may do anything short of murder, and the flunkies, so long as they are retained, will keep your secrets as do the massive granite walls. Your friends, whatever the bond that binds them to you—loyalty, pull, graft, business, vice, crime, or what not—may reach you through the "Eagle," and all

the world outside will remain in ignorance of your meeting, or your plotting.

These massive doors, front, side and rear, lead into many suites where young men learn to take the downward way; where drunkards are made to order; where women, and many of them wives, are bought and sold; where the people's liberties are traded in by statesmen as puts and calls are dealt upon the board of trade; where Captains of Industry plan their gentlemen's agreements and their next sally upon some crippled business; where employers meet the agents they have hired to hire other men to spy upon the men in their employ; where judges and attorneys meet to misconstrue the law.

Here, behind these massive walls, you may see the meeting of all the forces that cut deep into the virtues of our time, save one. Saloon, hotel and lodging house, this club has such respect for Madame Vaughn and the common decencies that women are barred by law. However, it has been whispered that members have entertained lady friends, the latter in male attire.

In its gymnasium on quiet nights "pugs" from the squared circle are entertained. In its card rooms, young bloods who live beyond the need to labor sit down to lose the gold their fathers wrung from industry to card sharps who in politics are leaders in the municipality's struggle for better things. In athletics the gaming proclivities of the Eagle's brood debases whatsoever it touches.

Are the majority of the members of the Eagle such debased, depraved, debauched men as this indictment would imply? No, surely not! The Eagle Club can send its full membership forth upon short notice to grace a "function" in the name of charity, and each man jack of them will appear in immaculate linen, faultlessly attired, and stand approved of the world—a gentleman. Again, within its portals this club has entertained the paunchy prognosticator and the gold-filled human icicle. Its lavish hospitality has been tested by every grade of nobleman the old world has produced, and others who, craving the servile worship of the free and the brave, to say nothing of the chance of securing a few good American millions, have passed the portals

of the Eagle as lords, counts, dukes, and earls, when in truth they were but sorry adventurers, though probably of better blood than were the men they aped. No, surely the Eagle Club is not to be lightly condemned. Its every member has the outward seeming of gentility; and this same outward seeming is society's sole badge of honor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WHITE SLAVE PEN.

On the Sunday appointed for the introduction of just another of our country girls to the mysteries of city life, a closed carriage drew up on a side street near the depot at ten minutes to four. "Slick" Snively alighted therefrom and sauntered over to the great central station, leaving no less a personage in the carriage than Fagan. At five minutes past four "Slick" reappeared at the least frequented exit from the station carrying a suit case and leading a pretty young woman. Immediately the driver of Fagan's carriage whipped up his team and pulled up on the corner just long enough to allow Fagan to open the door from within, when "Slick" threw the suitcase in and hurriedly assisted the young lady to enter. With a signal to the driver "Slick" turned and walked rapidly toward the heart of the city, as the carriage rattled away over the ill-paved streets toward the south.

Upon regaining her breath after being hurried from the train to the carriage Estella took a good look at the lady sitting opposite—no, she didn't like her—but then, in business we are not supposed to like people; we either use them or they use us. Was Mrs. Collins going to speak first? It seemed that that lady was well pleased with the golden silence. "Well, one of us must begin," the girl told herself, and the next moment was saying: "Pardon me; is this Mrs. Collins?"

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Collins," the lady replied, smiling, and wondered how many other names "Slick" would invent for her.

"Mr. Johnson informs me that you are the leading saleslady, and will have charge of my education." Fagan nodded, and Estella asked: "May I enquire where we are going?"

"I am taking you to my house."

"I'm so glad!" the girl exclaimed, and added: "I must look like a fright after riding almost all day—but isn't it putting you out to take me to your home?"

"Oh, no," Fagan assured her, "I am quite used to taking care of the girls Mr. Johnson gets for our business." Turning from the girl's searching eyes, she smiled grimly as she noted the progress they were making.

The sights of the town had attracted Estella's attention and she was intensely interested in the passing throng, while a number of those at whom she gazed turned a second time to look at the sweet face at the carriage window. Seeing this, Fagan deliberately lowered the blinds over the upper half of the glass, observing as she did so, that she didn't enjoy being stared at.

When the carriage stopped in front of Fagan's there wasn't a soul in sight, unless we are charitable enough to assume that the beer-tub of a policeman, who waddled away as the carriage drew up to the curb, had a soul. This policeman, as dirty as the law allows; as lazy as a fat coon at the after end of a sun bath, knew all about Fagan's. His waddling away out of sight of the house would allow him to swear upon honor, should trouble come, that, he "never seen nobody tooken out iv th' rig th' day ye mention."

Gus, Fagan's burly bartender, ran out and opened the carriage door, the driver and he exchanging winks and grins the while. Fagan threw the suitcase to him; as he caught it with one hand he reached the other beer-stained paw into the carriage.

"Let the gentleman help you out," Fagan admonished the girl, who shrank back from the leering hulk before her. In an undertone the woman asked: "Is the coast clear, Gus?"

Gus winked, caught Estella by the sleeve of her jacket, and in a twinkling, with the assistance of Fagan, the girl was whisked over the pavement and started on her way to the upper world; but not before she had caught a glimpse of the wretched street, the dirty, grime-covered pavement and the sickening squalor of all visible things about her. On the first landing Fagan turned to Gus, who still held Estella's arm in his grasp,

and said: "I can manage her now—you get back to the bar."

Down the hall Estella heard a man's voice in song, then the high falsetto of a female voice joined in the chorus. The words of the song—unprintable—brought a blush of shame to her cheeks. Out of a near-by doorway appeared a tousled-headed woman who had apparently just gotten out of bed. Her eyes were swollen, her face blotched with great, angry red pimples, her lips thick and protruding—her whole aspect one of abandon to dissipation and disease that had marked her for early death.

"Ruth," Fagan called to this wretched being, "where's 'Red?'"

"I don't know," Ruth answered, and again the chorus of that awful song floated out to them. Estella was struck dumb, almost paralyzed with fear, and her innocent brown eyes were turned upon the face of the woman Ruth. Horror, loathing, and all else that a pure young girl might feel in her presence, Ruth read in her face.

"What th' devil are you staring at?" she demanded, coming closer to the girl, who shrank back as from contagion.

"You're some now, ain't you? But you wait," the woman laughed. "If you're alive in five years just take another look in the glass—that's all." With that she turned to her room and, entering, slammed the door.

Estella had fallen at the feet of her captor without uttering a word. Ruth was called; so, too, the drunken man and his equally drunken companion; between them, this new victim of the "system" was carried to the top floor and deposited on a filthy bed in an inside room, where outcry could not be heard from the outside world; where rescue was all but impossible.

A bottle of vile whisky produced from the pocket of the drunken man, the burning liquid was forced between the lips of this sweet flower from God's garden—one of the children we love—who had been lured into hell. Lured into hell that respectable citizens and politicians might make profit out of the distillation of her beauty and virtue, then fling the residue of her young life on society's dung-heap for "W. C. A.'s" and other kindred patchers to pry at and pray over.

While the drunken man caressed his equally drunken mate; while Fagan stood speculating as to the cost of bringing the girl across; while Ruth looked at the newcomer with envy, telling herself that should she have such a chance as she saw ahead of this beautiful girl she would not be such a fool as to take to dope again; while they stood grouped about the bed, Estella regained consciousness. Springing from the bed, she ran to the door, to find it locked. With a cry that pierced to the floors below she threw out her hands:

"Mother, mother, mother—God forgive me! you knew!"

"Oh, if mother could only see me now!" the drunken man mocked, while Ruth and his companion laughed at the agony of the victim.

"Clear out and leave her to me!" Fagan commanded, and the trio quit the room, the man insisting that he was entitled to a kiss for having carried her upstairs. "Send 'Red' up!" Fagan shouted after them, and turned to find the girl on her knees at her feet.

'Mrs. Collins, tell me," the girl pleaded, "as you remember your own mother, "what kind of a place is this you have brought me to? Tell me, in the name of God!"

"Oh, cut it!" Fagan cried, catching Estella by the shoulders. "I'm tired of hearing you young things beg in the name of God for a day or two, then in the name of mercy after you find that the preacher's god don't reach outside the church; then when you know what you're up against, it's 'Please, Fa——Mrs. Collins, tell me what you want and I'll do it.' I tell you I'm tired of it."

Shuddering in every fiber of her being, this seventeen-year-old daughter of the church crouched before her captor. No longer holding to the skirts of this hag of hell, the literal, all too literal hell, she bowed her head and steeled her heart to hear her doom.

"There's no hope of any of your people finding you." The girl winced, but no sound escaped her set lips. "And so if you have a lick of sense you will take what's a straight tip. The sooner you and I come to terms, the sooner you'll get out of this room and move downstairs. With your youth and that face and figure of

yours, the fool men will fall over themselves to give you anything you ask for; and I tell you flat you've got to come to it. You're going to have time to think it over; but when that time's up there'll be things doing if you don't come across, that's all."

Fagan looked down at her victim, and in a matter-of-fact voice added: "When you come right down to business, this is just as honorable and all that sort of rot, as marrying for money—so make up your mind to do what I want you to, and the sooner you do the better for you. For instance, how would you like to have Gus, the gent that met us at the carriage, come up and visit you?"

"Oh, not that! not that!" Estella protested, springing to her feet to face her tormentor.

Fagan backed toward the door, saying: "Well, think it over—there's been girls in this room that fared worse."

For hours after Fagan left the room Estella Davis lay upon the filthy bed weeping and praying, then complete exhaustion brought sleep to her troubled mind's rescue. When she awoke it was to find a red-haired woman bending over her, saying in no unfriendly voice: "So our country bird has had a good night's sleep, has she?"

"Have I been here all night? Is this another day? O my God, I can't bear to think. Is there no way out of this wretched place? Please, please help me; isn't there a way out?" The girl poured a flood of questions at the woman who stood by the bed intently studying her.

A chill of death pierced her heart as she looked into the woman's eyes, when she had spent herself questioning, and heard "Red" Kate's verdict:

"There's just two ways, an' one of them's to die."

"If I don't do what Mrs. Collins wants, how long will they keep me here?"

"Until you're ready to give in and do like the rest of us has to do. I tell you there's only one way to git out of here alive," "Red" asserted, firmly.

Leaving the bed, Estella examined every corner of her prison, peered into a smelly clothes closet, turned to another door and found nothing but a pile of filthy rags

in an equally filthy toilet room; all lit from a skylight upon which the year's accumulation of soot and dirt had never been removed. In all her search she found nothing upon which to hang a hope for bodily comfort, let alone a way looking toward liberty. Turning back to the woman who had watched her every movement, she inquired, "Where are my clothes and all the things I brought here?"

"Perkin' up some, all right, when you can ask after your glad rags the second day," Kate observed, as the girl sat on the edge of the bed. "First one I've seen in here that didn't' either pull out hair by the handful, or sulk like a settin' hen. Say," she continued, "I would honest hate to see you stripped and starved. You're made of th' right stuff, an' I'd like t' help you. You jist better tell the Madame you're ready for biz an' have it over with. An' you don't need to worry none, she ain't going to hand you over to Gus an' th' gang that comes here; she won't turn you over to no such blokes as them. Why (with cool, discriminating eye judgment she looked the girl over from head to foot), you ought to fetch the top, an' fall plump into a tub of good things. God, girl! I wisht I had your chance!" Her exclamation was vehement.

As the girl measured the woman before her, and realized that she was speaking from the heart, earnestly seeking to do what lay in her power to aid, a deep pity for the woman filled her soul. "Red" Kate was not all bad, then; something of womanliness was still hers after the buffeting of all the years of her slavery.

"What do you mean? What chance do they offer me, which, if you had it, would improve your lot?"

"Improve my lot!" she grasped the girl's arm. "Girl, you don't know what even the lot of such as me is in one of these places. I'm the dog, the drudge, the—the —my God, don't you drive them to torture you until you ain't fit to go out of here. Promise Madame to do anything she asks if she will only git you some swell guy to take care of you. Lie to her; make her believe you have been on the turf. But stick to it that you won't have nothing to do with the scum that comes to this place—it's the only way out."

Steps sounding in the hall, "Red" Kate made a sign

of silence to the prisoner and busied herself about the untidy room. A key turned in the lock and Fagan entered, looking first at the girl on the edge of the bed, then at Kate as she stooped over a shabby rug.

"You can go, "Red;" if our visitor wants to clean house it will be good exercise for her to look after the room herself." Estella did not look up, even after Kate had gone, and she knew Fagan stood regarding her.

"Well, Miss Moore, how are you this morning?" At the question Estella gave a quick glance about, and Fagan laughed.

"You don't seem to recognize your new name," she bantered.

"My new name?"

"Yes, Miss Norma Moore; ain't it a stunner?"

"But it's not mine; you know it's not mine," the girl protested.

"I know it is yours, and advise you to forget that you ever had any other. You will find it a pretty good graft to have a good name, so you ought to thank me instead of looking at me as though you were afraid I might eat you."

"I'm not afraid," Estella retorted, but her heart thumped in panic as the woman grinned and came to her.

"How are you feeling this morning?" Fagan next asked, and was surprised at the answer.

"I'm hungry as a wolf. If you will remember, I haven't had a bite since I ate my lunch on the train yesterday." Narrowly she watched every line of her jailer's face. Was she all bad? Was there nothing to do but fight for time and hope that Kate might accomplish her deliverance? If that were the only way out, she must not quarrel with Mrs. Collins. There was grave doubt on the keeper's part as well. What sort of a girl was this? Young and innocent-looking, but she didn't rave and pray as the others did. Would she be the easier handled for that, or would it be another case like that of the big blond—they were some alike, Fagan told herself as she turned at the door to say, "I'll have something sent up, and hope you will forgive me for not thinking of it last night."

On the floor below she found "Red" Kate. "Say,

'Red,' what's the rip with the girl upstairs—she hasn't caved this soon, has she?"

Kate laughed. "Fooled you, didn't she? She ain't got no cavin' to do. Why, she's a sport, and a top-notcher at that, or you may steam me." "Red" was laying the wires for Estella's release, without the young lady knowing aught of the matter, and it is quite likely that she would have been forbidden to hint such a lie to Fagan had Estella been consulted.

The girl in the room above sat down when Fagan left her to face the greatest problem of her life. She did not dare to die, even if means to that end were at hand. A religious faith that doomed the suicide to suffer outside the gates of heaven through all eternity left but one path open to her. She wondered if "Red" Kate really knew just how hard that path would prove to be? And what would happen should she refuse to wear her new name and surrender her virtue? Satisfied that there was but one thing to choose, and that a life abhorrent, she threw herself on the bed and buried her burning face upon the tear-soaked pillow, and was still crying out that the thing they asked of her was more than she could give, even for life itself, when Kate brought her breakfast.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TRAGEDY AT MADAME'S.

At Madame Vaughn's the night after Estella Davis arrived at Fagan's a tragedy was enacted that cost the life of one of her charming daughters, also the life of a transient customer—a visitor to the city.

But think not that the harmony drawn from taut gut and wire under strain, and that happiness projected in lewd jest and ragtime, in Madame's old red brick mansion is to be hushed; or that this establishment is to be brought to book and made to give an accounting of its connection with this tragedy, wherein an erring brother chancing upon a long lost sister, took into his own puny hands the instrument of vengeance, plunging two lives, in a moment of insanity, into the great beyond.

No, there is too much of power, too much of social explosive, too much of intrigue, too much of profit, too much of practical politics stored in the old red brick mansion for the two dead bodies to be given into the hands of the city's officers.

No sooner is the last shot fired, the last body fallen to the velvet covered floor of Madame's parlor, than the underground force that serves to bind crime and politics was put to work. Telephones ring and ring again. Out from dark and loathsome places in our great metropolis men and women come trooping to do the will of this entertainer of wealthy, representative citizens. The orders issued by Madame are that these bodies be removed.

In the gray light of the next morning the man's body was found by working men on their way to toil, half hidden by weeds upon a vacant lot. The "victim" had been roughly used; clothes torn and pockets rifled (the loot Madame's servants left upon the body paid in part the cost of having him thrown there). The

police were notified, but before their arrival a morbid crowd had collected, and proceeded roundly to curse the police and the hold-up men, as they pushed and craned, and struggled to view the remains.

No mark of identification, no name; just another stranger in a strange city murdered and robbed on the highway. How that commonplace mob of average citizens of the common life would have shuddered could they have divined the awful social tragedy written in the death of this nameless one!

Far from the old red brick mansion that morning, on a street given over to the lost among women, to poverty and crime, festering crime, in a dilapidated building displaying the sign "Furnished Rooms," in a small back hallroom lay the body of a young and beautiful woman. She lay with her dark mass of hair hanging to the floor, her body half on, half off the bed. Upon the floor lies her brother's revolver. The daily press told that morning of a brutal murder on the West Side, and in the next column of the News you may read the story of a beautiful woman's suicide in a cheap lodging house in the red-light district.

At all events, the woman who kept the house swore the girl had been with her for more than a week. Swore that she had kept to her room almost constantly. And still swore she was positive there was no one with the girl when she shot herself—yes, she heard the shot fired, but thought it was some of the boys practicing in the basement.

One of the girls in the house swore she went out with "Lib" the night before. That they had returned together, and "Lib" (they gave her this name after death, and it fitted as well as another) was feeling down on her luck and talked about ending it all. That "Lib" went up to her room about eleven o'clock. No, she didn't hear the shot, but she swore she believed the girl had killed herself, as she had threatened to do.

* * * * * *

To-day Madame Vaughn's daughters and nieces are not quite so buoyant as is their wont, but business goes on, laughter and song still cheer the merry gentlemen who pay the score. Madame, too, is depressed, not that she fears the crime will be traced to her doors, but rather

that the knowledge of the tragedy which will find both voice and ears among the inner circle of her retainers is likely to affect business adversely for several days to come. On still another count Madame mourns. Was not this fresh young beauty, soon to rest in one of the city's pauper lots, one of the sweetest baits she had ever had to dangle before the greedy eyes of her clients? And surely, most surely, the loss of the profit this girl's surrender brought to Madame's bank account is reason enough to account for Madame's rather sullen face this morning. We find Madame seated at her writing table in a boudoir filled to overcrowding with all the comforts and luxuries modern labor, ingenuity and art so abundantly produce by the aid of machinery, in this age of machines and human things to run them. A boy enters—page to this queen in the kingdom of painted Eves.

"Fagan's downstairs, and wants to see you," he announced.

"Fagan?" Madame looked up. "So Fagan wants her pay for the part her people had in covering up the tragedy rather hurriedly," Madame thought, but to the boy she said, "Show her up. Wait; did she come in by the front way?"

"What? Fagan?" the boy asked. The very suspicion that Fagan could be so indiscreet, and in broad daylight at that, was resented by this world-wise youth. "I should say not! She came up the alley. Fagan wasn't born yesterday," he concluded, with a laugh.

Madame did not like the woman who in the hall below was waiting the return of the boy. Fagan is not in Madame's class. The gulf between is measured not so much by class distinction as by the wide difference in the methods used by the two for the piling up of profits. Madame holds herself the more respectable. Madame may be a sinner, she admits as much; but Fagan is impossible, unspeakable! She was still thinking of this difference when a cheery voice sounded from the doorway, and Fagan, superbly gowned and jeweled, stood bowing her salutation.

"Come in, Fagan; I'm delighted to see you, for I can hand you the money to square your folks for handling that job the other night."

"Why," Fagan declared as she seated herself across the table from her hostess, "do you know I never thought of that—what I came to see you about is a girl down at my —— street place. I have no use for her down there, and I thought since Myrt—well, since the trouble you had here the night before last—if you could get a girl to take her place, one who is in every way as good, better, in fact, better figure, better eyes, better mettle, 'a topnotcher,' I thought you'd be glad of the chance."

Madame was surprised that Fagan should have the nerve to offer her, the great Madame Vaughn, a girl from such a place, and showed it.

"Why, Fagan!" she exclaimed, "whatever put it into your head that I could possibly use one of your girls?"

"She isn't one of my kind, Isabella. That's why I knew you'd want her. She's different."

"Where did you pick her up?" Madame inquired.

"In the country—oh, she's not an unformed, gawky, gander-legged thing," the visitor added hastily; "she's the best ever, and in the duds you'd put on her she'd be worth at least two hundred dollars clean money per month to you."

"And suppose I took this country paragon off your hands, how much would it set me back as an investment?"

"We won't talk about that now; you come and see the girl—you won't be hard to deal with after that."

"Honest, Fagan," Madame answered, "I don't like to go down there."

"Suit yourself, Isabelle; I remember the time when you wasn't so damned partic——"

"Cut it, Fagan. We don't need to quarrel," Madame interposed softly. "Suppose I come down in a closed carriage to-morrow at three; will that suit you?"

"Anything to please you," Fagan replied.

* * * * * *

Closeted behind the close-locked doors of Fagan's upper world, Madame Vaughn sat in consultation with the mistress of the place at the time appointed.

"You are too superstitious, Fagan. To hear you talk, one would think you had seen a combination of black cat and hen to-day; and your suspicions about the

girl are all wrong. She will never care enough about you to make an attempt to see this place again, and if she did see it, it's so much like a thousand others that unless she took the number she couldn't swear to it. Suppose she did; she doesn't know anything else, does she?"

"No, she don't, and what's more, I don't propose that she shall. She is going out of here asleep, and you may have the pleasure of her surprise when she wakes up at your place. It won't hurt her a bit," Fagan protested, as Madame seemed to object; "just a few knock-out drops in a cup of tea about bedtime, then they can handle her, and she'll never know where she was before you got her."

"All right, but don't hurt her; she's costing me too much," the Madame urged, as she took a well-filled wallet from the handbag. "Two hundred for the girl, and one-fifty for that work the other night." She held the bills in her hand, while Fagan with outstretched arm and wiggling fingers waited. Madame looked squarely at Fagan and said: "You're pulling my leg in great shape."

"Oh, cheese it, Vaughn," the speaker's arm was stretched to the limit, "pulling nothing. Why, if I had a swell joint like yours, and a couple of panels on the side, I'd say nothing about the extracting of a little wad like that hurting—give me the coin."

Madame counted the money into her hostess' hand without further comment until Fagan said, "Gee, I'd like to have your roll."

"You ought to know by this time that the politicians and police take three-fourths of all we get," Madame protested hotly, "and damn 'em, I'd like to blow 'em sky high."

Madame has claws, and on occasion can use them as well as her tongue. As she spoke her beautiful features lost for the moment their last pleasant curve and her eyes shone like points of light as she cursed the guardians of our public morals for their robbery of her treasure. Some day she hopes to repay with interest all the insults and petty persecutions she has suffered. And as each day adds to her store of remembrances, and each day also brings its cross of smiles and wiles with

which to meet those who take the lion's share of her spoils, this beautiful-faced queen of the under world is being shaped into an instrument of vengeance for use upon those who have made of her a plaything for their pleasure and profit. This woman is dangerous, all upright people declare. She is. Could those who take a salary from society and a profit from vice look into her eyes as she curses them and their greed, they, too, would declare her dangerous, and draw but little comfort from their next dividend from the under world. Some day the Madame may refuse to pay for protection—what then? Some day a moral spasm may strike us and last more than a month. Madame's old red brick mansion and the panel houses may be raided, for good and all. Madame in court is almost as dangerous to some of our pillars of society as the panel houses are to young farmers, older farmers and visiting merchants, and others who seek the by-paths of life when at a safe distance from their loving families.

Fagan's face was a study as Madame railed against those who robbed her. Craft and cunning marked Fagan's every step through the maze in which such business as hers must be transacted.

"Don't do nothing rash, Isabelle. Our time will come. You don't need to think I have been facing the pen or worse these five years without having something up my sleeve for the goo-goos if it comes to a showdown, so you go ahead and blow them up when you get everything fixed and rest easy about my being in on it. I've got the goods on enough of them, and got it down in black and white, to turn this town wrong side out. And I'll say again, as I have many a time before, I'd enjoy a trip down the canal if I could only know that some of the men I've had to put up to were going along. Say, Isabelle, if just you and I could get into all the papers tomorrow morning and tell the good folks what we know about things in this town, wouldn't there be a bomb dropped into high life that would put the anarchists and gamblers a thousand years in the past?"

The Madame laughed and the beauty curves came out upon her pretty face until she looked as good as a saint at prayer. The smile faded as she looked at Fagan. "Don't look at me that way, your face would frighten the

devil himself," she reached across the table and tapped Fagan on the arm, "some day you'll be driven a little farther than usual, and you won't wake up till that bomb of yours has exploded. No, Fagan," she went on seriously, "there's nothing for us but to play the game. We play the game, do the drudgery, take all the abuse, and in the end go to hell; others hold all the marked cards, have all the pleasure, take all the profit, and the preachers tell them they are going straight to heaven."

Madame Vaughn arose to go. "Cheer up, Fagan," she said in parting, "forget the bomb, be as good to the girls as you can, and take it all out on the men. Take the last cent they have and half their clothes; they deserve it. Of course," she added, "they get the swag away from us somehow, but we have this satisfaction, they are all men, the one half of them we rob, the other half rob us, the first are fools and the last are thieves—some day we may need that bomb, but not soon. Have the girl sent up on time, and don't you dope her too heavy."

CHAPTER XX.

"THEY'S ONLY ONE WAY."

The door of Estella's room opened and "Red" Kate entered. Setting a tray of victuals on the little table she turned to the occupant of the room:

"There you are, my beauty, and it's a better breakfast than any of us has had in months, and by Madame's orders at that."

The girl lifted her face from the pillow, her eyes red and swollen from weeping. For a moment Kate looked at her in silence, while something of terror grew in her own eyes. "Girl, girl," she cried, "if you don't want to have me murdered, if you want me to help you, you jist got to quit that blubbering. Why, if Fa—Mrs. Collins was to come in and see you in that fix after the con talk I've give her, she'd have our lives. An' if she didn't kill me she'd at least give you the same dose some of the others git. She would, by God, she would!"

The frightened girl promised to dry her tears and be good, promised to do anything Kate directed if the latter would only say that there was no other way out of slavery.

When she was quieted Kate admonished her to be careful not to even talk above an ordinary tone, saying: "If some one was to hear you, they'd tell her and I'd never see you again until they'd given you the 'cure.' Now don't say a word," as Estella started to interrupt. "You sit down in that chair and let me put you next to the way Fagan—there, it's out. But don't you ever breathe that name until you hear some one else use it. Fagan's her name, and all the other names like Mrs. Collins is only used to fool the folks that might look for the girls they rope in. Don't you ever squeal on me, or they'd kill me."

"I won't, Kate, I promise that whatever they may do to me I won't tell them anything you say to me.

But won't you tell me just what that awful woman has done to other girls? Then I will know the worst, and—and——"

"There, there, girl, don't go off into no more cryin' spells again, or our jig's up. It isn't so bad, and it won't be bad at all if you'll only do as I want you to; and who knows, when you have friends and lots of money maybe you might help me to git away, too."

"Oh, I will! I will! God knows I will!" the girl protested.

Kate smiled, and into her heart there crept a longing she had thought dead years before she met Estella Davis. With a sigh she resumed the conversation.

"I best hurry and tell you about this crib, then, an' how I am in hopes of getting you out." Then, thinking of the untasted breakfast on the tray, she added hastily. "But first you eat your breakfast—I'd most forgot that. Then I'll come up t' git the things and put you wise."

"I would rather talk to you than to eat," Estella insisted.

"But I can't stay long at a time; they's spies on every floor; you eat now, and when I come back I'll tell you in a jiffy."

As Estella ate a light breakfast, she told herself that the stolid-faced, red-headed drudge was honest in her friendship and offer of help, and if it was as Kate had said, a case of choosing not her own way but a path that promised freedom in the end—well, she would listen to the argument. For one thing she was done with crying. She would show even "Red" Kate that there was something of courage in her make-up.

When Kate returned she closed the door and locked it, saying: "Now, Miss, Fagan's gone, but she may be back any minute, so I've got to hump myself and put you next. This joint is said to be one of the worst in town, anyway the men that comes here says it's the limit. Fagan runs three or four places, but this one is the only place where they bring young girls, and they come regular—you know how they git them, I don't.

"You're the first one in two years that hasn't jist literally raised all kinds of hell—I beg your pardon—but they sure did. They screamed, tore their hair,

wouldn't eat, and then mostly went into the sulks. First off they wouldn't eat, and done a lot of prayin'. Some of them killed their——" the narrator hesitated.

"Killed themselves here! Here in this room?" Estella's shuddering and nervous look around, alarmed Kate.

"Land sakes, girl, you haven't got nothing to be afraid of," she declared stoutly, "if them poor little critters ever does come back, as some says, it won't be to this hell-hole—and besides, they didn't kill theirselves in here no way."

"How many, Kate, and where did they do it?" Estella clung to Kate's arm, wild-eyed with horror of it all.

"Three."

"Three, Kate?"

"Yes, three killed theirselves where we used to keep 'em, since I come here two years ago. And one big blonde girl, after Fagan thought she had give in, killed a man Fagan sent to her. No, it wasn't on this floor, you don't need to look around like that. It was on the floor below. You see the girl had gone all the stages from prayin' to fighting, until after she's been well starved, then she told Fagan she'd put on the dress and go down, and at that she laughed and said she wanted a good dinner first. She got the dinner, and I give her a bath and fixed her out in the regulation togs and sent her down. I remember jist as well as if it was yesterday. Fagan stood at the foot of the stairs waitin' for her, a smiling as hard as she could, for the girl was a good looker and Fagan thought she was going to make a good bunch of money off her. The girl went up and throwed her arms around Fagan and kissed her and asked where the bridegroom was. Fagan says something low to her, lookin' mighty queer out of her eyes, and sent the girl into the back parlor. Then Fagan went to the front parlor where this man was. He came out and she pointed out the back parlor door. He was a good lookin' chap—I thought he looked as if he'd strayed in from the farm. He went down the hall, me watching from the head of the stairs. He stopped jist a minute, then opened the door and went in." Kate shuddered.

"And then——"

And then—*I* heard such a scream, and three blows, thud, thud, thud, and a moan. I don't know how I got downstairs, but I was down and right behind Fagan when she ran into the room. Then, before you could think, that crazy girl struck Fagan on the head with the bronze figure she had killed the man with, an' Fagan fell in a heap. The girl jumped back and throwed that thing all covered with blood at us who stood trembling in the door, and laughed fit to kill. The next minute she was on her knees stroking the man's hair, and saying all kinds of things to him. Just then Gus, that's the bartender, come up and taking her by the arm he lifts her up and tells her there's a lady and gentleman to see her, waiting in a carriage at the door, and asks won't she let him escort her down—she got up laughing and clapping her hands—I ain't seen her since."

"And the man, was he dead?"

"Yes, they made me wash the blood up while he was laying there—I know he was dead—they took him away in the night, like they does all the rest. And Fagan, her hair saved her; but lord, she had a splittin' headache for days after they brought her out of it.

"Oh, this horrible, horrible house!" The girl walked the length of the room wringing her hands and murmuring a prayer for the green fields of home, now seemingly in another world. "Oh, Kate! how can I get away from it? How can I?" she cried.

"There's only one way," came the answer.

CHAPTER XXI.

NORMA JORDAN.

The morning after Madame Vaughn's visit to Fagan's ——— street place, when she had examined Estella as closely as the average slave trader was wont to examine his purchase of black humanity, Estella awoke in a strange new world.

The bright flood of sunlight that a girl in spotless cap and apron let in through the great east window blinded her for a moment. Where was she? What had happened? Could it be a dream, this beautiful room. Never in all her castles in Spain had there been just such a room—it could not be a dream. She let her eyes wander over the walls hung with beautiful pictures, to the splendid rug upon the floor, then to the great window again, then up to the penciled ceiling and back to the bed. Burying her face in the downy softness of the snowy pillow she lay for a time trying to connect this morning with the past. How had she been delivered from the house of horrors and that awful woman. Peeping out she sought the figure of the girl to assure herself that it was all real. Compared to that loathsome place where she had slept only when weariness of mind and body had overcome her repugnance for the unclean bed upon which she must lie or choose a more filthy floor, this was heaven. But was she alive? Sitting up quickly she discovered that the nightgown she wore was in itself a treasure, loaded with real lace and ribbons, but cut so low that she blushed and drew it more closely about her shapely shoulders as she caught the eyes of the maid upon her.

"Where am I" she asked.

"In your own room, Miss Jordan, and Madame Vaughn asked me to tell her the moment you awoke, so if you will excuse me—" the girl was gone.

"Miss Jordan; I wonder what she meant. What in

the world could have happened to twist her face up in that way? She looks like a fright, but her voice is sweet, and her smiles break through. I do wonder what can have happened to her." Lying back among the pillows, her hands clasped behind her head, Estella gave herself up to the puzzle of it all. "How did they bring me here, and when?" she asked of the great brass bed. "Was it yesterday, or the day before? Let me see, I went to Fagan's room the night Madame Vaughn was there, they sent me away with Kate, then after Madame had left Fagan called me and gave me a cup of tea—and —yes, they must have drugged me. I remember just as well, Kate whispered to me as she helped me undress, 'good-by, don't forget me,' and I felt so queer."

"Good morning, Miss Jordan, I hope you enjoyed your night's rest?" Madame stood in the doorway, playfully shaking a finger at the wondering girl. "You lazy girl," she scolded and smiled as she entered the room, "it's almost noon and you haven't gotten the sleep out of your pretty eyes."

Estella looked at the woman wonderingly. Could it be possible that this smiling lady, clad in the very neatest of house gowns, looking at her as her own mother used to, and in this beautiful room—could it be possible that she was bad? A blush answered her thought.

"Do you like your room, Miss Jordan?"

The girl's eyes had a frightened look in them as she asked: "What did you call me?"

"Oh, just a pet name I have found for you while you stay with me—Norma Jordan—don't you think it's a nice name?" Madame sat on the edge of the bed.

"Am I not to have my own name?"

"Child, you couldn't have your own name, don't you understand? Some day you may want your name again and the only way to keep it is to forget it now."

Estella played with the lace upon her sleeves while she sat thinking of the part Kate had assigned her, and the woman looking at her guessed half the truth, but withal was satisfied with her bargain.

"Why did Fagan—I mean Mrs. Collins drug me?" was her first question, once she had determined upon her attitude toward her new keeper.

"Where did you get that name?" Madame asked sharply.

"Oh, I wasn't always crying at Mrs.—at Fagan's," she replied, "you see there were lots of things to be heard after I got downstairs," with a wry little mouth that ended in an attempted smile, she looked into Madame's eyes, saying: "Suppose I do know her, what does it matter so long as I am Norma—Norma—what was it?"

"Norma Jordan."

"Oh, yes; it is a pretty name, and now that I am here in this beautiful room, I suppose I ought to thank both you and Fagan for having brought me here without my being put to the inconvenience of doing more than to drink a cup of tea—for all the world like the Arabian Nights tales, is it not?"

Madame laughed, but did not reply to the question.

"If my new boarder is to have breakfast today it is time she were up; and besides, I have some gowns in the closet over there, which I had thought to loan you until you can take money enough out of your stocking to buy a new——"

"What do you—" Estella almost added, "mean by money out of my stocking?" but checked herself, and after a painful pause asked: "Didn't they send my clothes and money? Fagan promised me she would give all my things back."

"Not on your life!" the Madame exclaimed, and went on: "While we are on that subject I might just as well tell you that we have to protect ourselves, and for that reason you will probably never see a stitch of the clothes or anything else you brought to the city with you, but you need not worry," she added kindly, "you won't want for anything as long as you board with me."

"Thanks," the new Miss Jordan murmured in a low voice, "I believe I will get up now."

"Very well," Madame went to the doorway and called the maid, saying to the new boarder, "the girl will help you dress, and you will find all you need in the wardrobe in that closet, if they need altering the girl can do that too. Tomorrow will be time enough for us to talk business; good morning."

The owner of a new name sat on the edge of the bed seriously regarding the ends of her pink toes, and repeat-

ing over and over: "Tomorrow we will talk business, tomorrow we will talk business," when a timid knock sounded through the room and brought her back to the present moment and its immediate problems.

"Come in," she invited the invisible one, as in fascination she centered her gaze upon the opening door. Would it be that strange girl? Yes, it was she. Norma Jordan's eyes dropped under the eager look of the girl.

Future perils could not entirely destroy the pleasure Norma Jordan found in trying on the gowns the maid brought from the wardrobe, once breakfast had been disposed of. The maid was an artist and seemed to lose herself and all memory of the past as she fitted Norma out with all the good things that had been allotted to her.

"Myrt's clothes seem to have been made for you," she told Norma while they were working on a beautiful evening gown, preparatory to Norma's trying it on.

"And who's Myrt?"

The girl looked at Norma long and earnestly, wondering if she dared tell the new boarder the truth. Her scrutiny convinced her that it would be dangerous. The girl before her might be a hardened sinner, but if she was, her face, her modesty, her every movement, proclaimed the very opposite.

"Who is Myrt?" the question was repeated.

"Oh," the maid answered, "she was one of us up to—up to a week ago, then she went away with her brother and—and left—left these clothes and things for—for—oh, my God! my God!" Sobbing as though her heart would break, she fell at Norma's feet.

"What is it, May," on her knees beside the weeping girl Norma begged her to tell what sorrow was upon her. "Tell me," she pleaded, "I have grown old enough in one week to be trusted, tell me." Her pleading availed not until the storm had spent itself, then May told her as much of the truth as she dared.

"It was just as I said, Norma; she went away. Her brother came and she went with him. I am a fool, Norma; and fools have no place in this world, much less in such a place as this. But she was so good to me, so good and brave, and suffered so. She was here a year, and in all that time she never uttered a cross word—and Norma, I've never been in this room since she went

away until they brought you here." She looked about her, unspeakable terror in her eyes. "Don't tell them I said anything about her—please don't—I'll do anything for you if you will promise."

"Promise, why, you goose, of course I'll promise. What does it matter?" she laughed, and the hard notes that come only from the lips of those who have given over the struggle, sounded for the first time from her sweet lips. "It's all mystery and intrigue," she went on, "and I am in the web. I've sold myself for the right to live, to eat, to breathe—why should I either pry into things the knowing of which would not help me, or withhold a promise that will help you? No, May, you and I are to be the very best of friends—let me make up to you for the loss of Myrt." She caught the girl in her strong young arms and kissed her disfigured lips. "There, and there," she exclaimed with each kiss, "now dry your eyes, and I will get into this beautiful gown; it must have cost hundreds and hundreds of dollars."

The girl released, staggered to a seat by the great east window, and laying her head against the back of the chair, sobbed in utter abandon to the heartbreak that gripped her.

Madame Vaughn, entering, caught sight of the sobbing girl and turned quickly to Norma, who was standing in the center of the room, the evening gown in her trembling hands. The red of anger mounted to Madame's painted cheeks as this question thrust itself upon her: "What had the girl told Norma?" Madame knew May's love for the murdered girl.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, striding toward the girl, who, at the sound of her voice, had vainly tried to subdue her emotions.

For a moment Norma was at a loss how to save her maid from Madame's anger. Madame had reached the huddled figure, her hand outstretched.

"Let her alone," Norma's lips again gave forth that metallic note of laughter. As the Madame turned to her, she explained: "It's my fault she's crying—I scolded her because she was awkward with my clothes." Deliberately walking to the chair, she shook the sobbing girl saying: "Come, you little goose, you've cried quite enough over nothing, now help me into this gown."

The Madame, smiling, turned to leave the room, when Norma called to her from within the folds of the gown, "Wait a minute, Madame Vaughn, I want you to see me in this gown."

"A perfect picture!" Madame exclaimed, as Norma stood before her in all the bravery of Myrt's dress. "You'll have no one but yourself to blame," she added, "if you don't have a wad as big as my arm inside of a year," Norma blushed and looked away, "and that blush," Madame declared, "is worth a million. I never had but one girl here who could blush like that, and do it to order; she's in Paris now in a mansion, with I don't know how many servants, and only one old millionaire to please, unless," she added, laughing, "she wants to please herself."

Madame patted the blushing Norma on the cheek, and whispered: "You will have my other boarders crazy with jealousy, Norma—and if there is anything they have that you want, just look at it; you won't have to whistle to it, or even crook your finger." Then, without so much as a look in the direction of May, she quitted the room.

"You are an angel, Norma! an angel!" the maid insisted as soon as Madame was out of the room. "Yes you are," she affirmed as Norma denied the insinuation. May stood looking into the brown eyes of her mistress, her poor disfigured face working strangely. "You are an angel," she insisted, "you kissed me, and lied to save me from Madame's anger—and she can be so cruel," she added with a shudder.

Norma looked at the girl, yet did not see her. Wondering what tragedy lay behind that face; what poverty of love she must have suffered in her life to prize so highly a girl's kiss. Dare she ask? No. Not now at any rate. She would not burden the sore-hearted girl with a single question, instead she took her in her arms again and kissed her, while their tears mingled and each knew without words the heart of the other.

When May had left the room and gone about the work she had neglected while preparing this new sacrifice for the altar of lust, her heart was rent with conflict—she, the drudge at Madame Vaughn's, as "Red" Kate was at Fagan's, had found a friend, and she be-

lieved that friend as pure and sweet as the dew new fallen upon the rose. Her heart bled for the girl in that beautiful room upstairs—bled for her, but to what avail? What power had she to reach up with her prayers to either man-made gods, or God-made men?

In her luxurious room Norma Jordan surveyed herself in the mirror. "So you are Norma Jordan are you?" she asked the girl in the glass. "Not long ago you were some other body." Slowly, as she looked at the beautiful gown, terror crept upon her. Turning from the mirror, she fled to the bed; there upon her knees she sobbed out a prayer for help.

In her hour of agony, the very clothing upon her body, the vain trappings she had fondled but a little time before, became hateful to her. Wildly she ran about the gilded cage. Searching in every corner of the wardrobe, bath, and the great room itself, the girl sought something with which to clothe herself aside from the things Madame had provided, the shimmering, clinging garments of dishonor. Even the clothes she had worn when taken from Fagan's had been removed and she was left with nothing other than the wardrobe furnished by the house. Heartsick with the sense of her shame, her helplessness, she cried out that God would forgive her if she refused to live.

CHAPTER XXII.

MADAME TALKS BUSINESS.

Madame went up to talk "business" to her new boarder. Norma was low spirited, but she determined that her bravery, to the last shred, should serve her where tears were in vain. Madame had talked long before she had come to the meat of her visit.

"One of our best young men (how she lingered over the title) called me over the phone this morning from his club, and wanted to know whether we could entertain him tonight. He's of good family and a great spender. I am going to give him to you. You don't need to be afraid to ask him for anything you want if you please him, and I don't see how you can help doing that—he'll go the limit." Her eyes devoured the beauty of the girl before her greedily. Here was promise of much gain—that superb body, those great brown eyes, that sweet warm skin with its new bloom of womanhood. Madame would put no heavy task upon this fresh young beauty. If she but pleased this millionaire's son there would be enough of gain. While Madame feasted upon anticipated profits, the girl's thoughts centered in this young man of good family. Could she play her part until they were alone, then throw herself on his mercy, and in the name of womanhood and innocence, induce him to give her back to her people. It is the only way, the only way, her conscience told her, while her lips formed the words: "Is he really of good family?"

"The best ever, swell people, and only two children; this young man and a sister."

So he had a sister; that was well; she would have another hold upon him; a strong hold upon his manhood. "When is he coming?" Norma questioned, her heart beats almost choking her.

"Tonight at 9 o'clock. You will meet him in the parlor—what follows is in your own hands." Norma

offered up a prayer that this might be true. "I'll send May up for you when he comes," Madame announced from the door as she departed.

Norma Jordan stood at the great east window while the sun built fires in a thousand windows in the east. Her heart sobbed but tears did not come to dim the strange luster of her eyes, as she prayed for strength to overcome this man. Could she have know how every weapon she held would but add zest to the oncoming enemy's struggle to possess her, she would have fallen there as the sun went down into the great west.

Laughter and song are at their height in the parlors of the old red brick mansion as the son of a good family is ushered in.

Before he came there were three men in faultless dress enjoying the society of Madame's daughters in the parlors. I shall give you an introduction.

Here, a man of forty, showing bald upon the crown, holds a painted beauty upon his knee and kisses her while trying to mimic the antics of the young who are fast held by chains they do not care to break, in the lurid land of puppy love. The woman older than her girlish garb and labored over cheeks by full ten years, feeds this esteemed father's infatuation by every trick learned in the seduction of real youth—and wins.

Upon a great, fat davenport in that arched corner, a mere boy sits, half hidden by the voluptuous being who has set herself the task of sucking the youth and sweetness out of his life.

This youth has not passed his eighteenth birthday; his fond parents imagine he is at the Eagle Club, mingling with our men of affairs, and there imbibing a liking for the steady grind of business life from the men of means whose names grace the register of the Eagle. Instead, he has learned to drain his glass with a toper for a running mate; to take a quiet hand with card sharp as guide. to play the ponies under advice from a well groomed piker; to look upon woman as fair game, with an instructor at his elbow who gains half his income from those who profit from the downfall of our gilded youth.

Here is a sample product of the Eagle. This boy, born to the purple of wealth, with all the world may give of opportunity, is to be robbed tonight of the one

thing neither wealth nor prayer may restore to him; and all because the woman was first robbed. What difference whether you looted her treasure of its priceless jewels yesterday, last year, or years ago? She will repay society to-night—you shall have a stench of filth, decay, disease, and death so long as the first crime committed against this woman goes unavenged.

In her room but a moment ago this piece of Eve's flesh, standing before her dressing-table, laying on the bloom of youth to hide the scars of dissipation, turned to the girl who sat idly watching her.

"Aggie," said she, "Little Willie is here again—Madame just sent word before you came in." Her pouting lips drew back from the even white teeth in a snarl, as she continued: "I'll get him to-night or——"

"Better turn him over to me, Helen," the other bantered, "I never had to work my rabbit foot overtime on a kid yet, and you've been a month trying to get your Little Willie upstairs."

"Don't you worry; he comes to-night if I have to carry him!" the other replied.

"Well, he's a payer all right, all right," the visitor giggled. "When he slipped that fifty into your sock the other night I thought I'd have a spasm—he blushed and stammered like a school kid. Say, either he's the limit or you've lost your grip. You've had him a month and haven't been able to cure him of blushing."

"Cut all that, Ag. I land him to-night, I tell you! I haven't lost my grip. I could have had him up here the first night if Madame hadn't cautioned me to go slow and draw him on gradually. When you know as much about this game as Madame does, you will not judge the stakes until the last hand is played out. When this kid came out here the first time he was straight from his mother's arms; never had done more than put his arms around some nice little girl and tickle himself to death with a hug." Aggie laughed, and this instructor of youth smiled at her own wit. "Jiggs sent word to Madame that he had landed this kid—that he was good enough to eat, and for us to cut out all horse play until we got him good and hungry."

"Think he's hungry to-night?" Aggie asked.

"Bet your last coin. What have I been doing for a

month? Just as nice, and getting a little bit freer each time—and money! Say, that kid William of mine don't know the value of a million dollars! He's put up close to three hundred bucks in the last month just to be tickled."

Her toilet finished, all that art and nature might do to take away man's reason and leave him a doddering idiot in the grasp of this wanton of the under world had been accomplished.

"For God's sake let up," Aggie shrieked, "you make me tired—and Little Willie will be crying his eyes out. Go on down and get busy."

The woman before the mirror knew the rest of Madame's daughters and nieces envied her. None of them dared challenge girlhood in their acting. She alone of the six was a perfect decoy, when made up, and she gloried in her ability to put on the vestments of youth and lead the young into the debauchery from which Madame so largely profited.

"You clear out. I may have him up here to look at my photographs and fancy work in ten minutes," a sneer upon her lips exposed again that pearly setting of even, white teeth, "and his mother and all the rest of them will never be able to take him away from me until I am done with him——"

"Until Madame is done with him," the other laughed.

Upon the fat davenport a youth has let go of himself, and in a sudden outburst of passion, well fed for a month, has smothered this perfumed counterfeit with kisses and caresses. She hides her face on his bosom and smiles in triumph, while he, poor fool, imagines her weeping—imagines himself a conqueror. Her white arms encircle his neck; she lifts her face a little—she dare not trust her eyes, the gleam of hell's total of rejoicing she may not hide—she whispers to him—her head falls back to its resting place a moment, and they are gone.

Hidden by a costly screen on the other side of this wide parlor, once the gathering place of men and women who in ignorance sowed the seed of corruption in our social state, a woman sits at the piano. At her side

stands a paunchy little man, under whose eyes the sacs of decay bag out and hang over full cheeks.

This man holds a place in the world of business; supports two mansions, one woman, a wife and family, yet finds time to spend a night at Madame Vaughn's occasionally. Even the cub reporters on our dailies know the unsavory history of this podgy little sac-eyed gentleman. To expose him, and bring about his ears the house of cards he has builded—what a scoop! Then what prevents?

The great hall clock ticks out the reason in its "dollars and cents," "dollars and cents," "dollars and cents."

This man's son, one of the young princes of our rotting aristocracy of dollars, was shot in a resort, the counterpart of Madame's old red brick mansion, but a few months ago. The newspapers of our city knew the story—knew that this young man, wounded fatally, was wrapped in a blanket, carried to a cab and taken to the place the world knew as his home. Wife and child saw him die; a truthful press—agent of virtue—defender of the American home—suppressed the truth, giving the world a story of accidental shooting, a story so absurd that even the ignorant complained of its unreasonableness. Why? Why? Why? You ask and ask again, and again the hall clock answers: "Dollars and cents," "dollars and cents," "dollars and cents."

The woman idly drumming upon the ivory keys while this podgy citizen devours her with his sac-balconied eyes, deserves a word.

Of regal height and well preserved, to look upon her without looking deep into her eyes is to miss the woman and see but the shell. In her eyes of changing gray a tragedy is written, and back, back behind the curtain present thought lets down, her tragedy lives and feeds, and grows and rends. Just now she has lifted the curtain; forgetful of the man her mind is going back over the years of sacrifice—back to the sunny brooks of girlhood, then forward again to that first mad day—struggle, temptation, yielding; pride, passion, repentance; all passing and repassing before the eyes of the woman idly drumming on the ivory keys, and her heart cries out that she may be spared the fate of the rear-guard of the long procession of her sisters. Back there, where the

clouds hover, where falls the stinging lash, the weak ones stagger along under their burdens of disease, while from their rotting bodies pollution of the social stream becomes more and more a danger to all. "Spare me that!" she cries in her heart, and bends still lower over the ivory keys, as she sees a woman in the front rank, where wealth fawns, suddenly fall by the wayside —"Spare me that!" On either side of this broad highway where the women of sin must take their way toward the land of To-morrow, her eyes behold a kneeling army of Christians, too pious to lift their eyes to the struggling mass of prostituted women in the highway. They are bowed in prayer, and heed not the cries of pain as the lash cuts the quivering flesh. They are content to pray, to weep a little, and greatly to condemn, while the giant hand of greed wields the whiplash of a hundred hungers, and the army of the fallen staggers, cursing, mocking, gibbering, to its doom.

All of this lies back of this woman's eyes. The man beside her asks for a song, and as she bends to seek the music, his puffed and stubby fingers fall upon her neck; she shrinks from the contact; then remembering her part, braces her body and turns her head to smile—the hand passes down, down over her shoulder and is hidden. The music is found, she straightens up, the man steps back. Touching a bell upon an onyx stand he waits. The woman begins the interlude, smiling so sweetly at him that her mastery of the art seems perfect.

Be careful there. You of the many millions, with wealth and slaves and playthings. This woman may go mad, stark, staring mad, to-night—to-morrow. Her racked body and tortured nerves, the tragedy of her life, this vision of your praying multitudes calling to a faraway God as they line the great highway and listen to the fall of the lash—all of these have combined to plant madness in her blood. To-night she may take your life, as your son's life was taken, by one like her. Beware!

The song ends—the singer swings upon the stool—the podgy man of millions claps his puffy hands and cries "Brava! brava! That was a corker! Give us another, sweetheart."

Behind him a boy of twelve—did I say a boy of twelve? Yes, a boy of twelve years, crammed with crime enough to contaminate the keeper of heaven's gate, stands waiting.

"Oh, the bellhop." Slowly this man draws a roll of bills from a vest pocket. "I counted 'em, my charmer," he snickers, tapping the woman on the cheek with the roll. Unfolding the bills he lays one upon the tray. "Tell Madame to give me a call at 8:30, and take up a basket of the same I had last time to——"

"He knows," the woman nodded and turns to the piano.

In a cozy corner, beneath an iron-girted lamp, casting soft lights on a table at which sits a man ill at ease and a woman struggling to hide her passion, another tragedy is working out. In setting our stage let us see what part is here in the playing.

At the Eagle Club, two hours ago, Jack Masters met his friend and begged him to go out to Madame Vaughn's and explain to Emma the reasons back of his neglect for a week past. This man at the table demurred, protested, explained, proposed a compromise, but finally yielded because he was a friend indeed.

As he sits looking into the eyes of the woman, he knows why Jack found so many excuses for not wanting to see her, yet insisted that some one must see her forthwith.

Beautiful, with that strange dark beauty of the Old South—a skin full of fire—eyes that burn, and melt, and burn again—lips as ripe as cherries, and as red—wide, arching brows supporting a broad forehead crowned with a wealth of glorious black hair—and this but half the picture. From the tips of her pink lobed ears to the laces that but half hide her swelling breasts, the smooth soft skin covers a perfection of curves. Her eyes to-night are more than black. Metallic points of light play in their depths. She scorns the man who seeks to tell of a lover's unfaith. And he reads in those eyes more than warrant for his instant death did this queenly beauty but hold the power.

"To send a stranger to me! To insult me so! Oh,

I will not bear it! I will not! I will not!" Her voice is low, so low, but the man is not deceived.

"But he just didn't dare to come—Miss—Miss——"

"Emma," she whispered.

"Miss Emma," he couldn't come because——"

"He preferred to send a stranger," she interrupted, scornfully; "and it is all of a week since he has been here; already Madame is asking——"

"Oh, that's all right," the man assured her; "here's an even hundred Jack sent out;" he laid the money on the table before her.

"Take it to him; I cannot touch—" her head fell. What choice had she? If she would be true to this man she must take his money; Madame must be paid.

"Oh, God!" she protested while thrusting the money into her bosom. The man in pitying her began to despise the friend who had sent him on this mission.

"Why did he send you, a man I had never seen?" she demanded. "Does he look upon me as a woman of the town?" The man winced, but decided that the only way out was for him to put up the best story he could —and God pity Jack when they meet again.

"Oh, no, not that, I assure you. He's in a beastly hole—you see his father saw you two last week, and put a detective on the scent after Jack had lied like a thief to shield you."

"To shield me." She clinched her hands until the tips of her fingers went white. "Go on. So long as I have let you begin, you may as well make an end of it."

"Well, he put the detective on the scent as I said. He shadowed you and reported. The old man cornered Jack and brought the detective out to confront him. Jack confessed, and—and the old man gave him the choice of throwing you over or being kicked out without a cent——"

"And he has decided?" The woman stood over him her eyes ablaze. "He has decided to throw me over and save the dollars?" Her hand upon his arm made him wince.

"No," he hesitated. "No, not that; but so long as his father has a man hired to watch him it would be suicidal for him to break his word."

"Break his word? Oh, God! He break his word!" She turned away from him to hide the agony of shame that tortured her. Standing thus she asked:

"Sir, do you know when he first learned to lie—to break his word—do you know when he committed a crime for which, if there be a God, he will surely die? Do you?"

Jack's friend choked; his throat refused its office—he struggled to find words—and was silent.

The woman looked down upon him. "I thought I hated you when you came to me, but I did not know what hate meant then. Listen. Jack Masters came into my life two years ago. It took him a year and a half to win my love. Having that, he labored three months to get me to consent to come to this city. He swore he could not live without me. We would be quietly married and live away from the world until his folks were convinced that he would not marry a woman who had money but whom he professed to despise. After months of entreaty on his part, I yielded this much; I would follow him to this city, and when he had convinced me that he would risk so much I would marry him, and hide from his family for a time——"

The man looked up, dark anger kindling in his eyes.

"He left me in my quiet Southern home to dream of a great love in a new home, and I swear to you, tho' you are but a stranger thrust into my life, I was as innocent as any woman who ever went to the altar when I came to this city three months ago. We were married——" the words were scarcely audible.

"Married!" he cried. "Why, he told me——"

"Yes," her lips trembled, but a devil danced in her black eyes "what did he tell you?"

"The hound told me he picked you up at the races somewhere and your beastly temper——" he blurted out then paused.

"That will do" she spoke quietly. "Now listen to me, Mr.— Mr.——"

"James Meyers."

"Listen to me, Mr. Meyers; that man married me. Those who assisted in the ceremony may have been as false as he, but I believed. We lived at a hotel a short time, then he brought me here, to a fashionable

boarding house as he said. Oh, what a farce! What a farce! And I, poor fool, lived here for weeks in ignorance of the nature of the fashionable boarders' social standing. Lived to myself, and for his love—and in the end this infamy is put upon me. Tell him—this friend of yours—that I shall pay Madame what I owe her and immediately leave this house. Once outside its walls his life is not safe! tell him this. Tell your friend—has he ever done a like act of kindness for you? Tell him I shall live to laugh at him when his last hope of forgiveness has faded—if there is a God, I will."

"I am not his friend. Damn him! I could kill him!" the man cried as the beauty of the woman, her misery, her power to hate, filled him. "I could kill the cur!" His teeth came together over the words.

"Do it! Do it! Only half kill him! Mark him for life! Maim him——" She was on her knees by his side, clinging to him. "Do this; then come back to me for your reward—ask anything, everything! Oh, God! If you would but do this for me!" Spent, she sank to the floor.

Our stage is set. Each piece of property in place. Joel Holdon enters the doorway, and Madame sends May up the grand stairway to summon Norma to the feast.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ARE YOU READY?

Norma Jordan looked toward the door as she turned from the mirror. "Yes," she answered, as May took her hand and lifted it to the twisted lips. "Yes," she repeated, as one in a dream, and followed the maid.

On the stairs, as she hesitated upon the landing, she could hear the great clock ticking—"Dollars and cents," "dollars and cents," "dollars and cents." As she descended a prayer went up from both May and herself to a God they believed to be all-powerful to save, both here and hereafter.

May led her to the parlor, whispering: "He's in the parlor now—he used to come when Myrt was—was here. God bless you, Norma, God bless you!" Gently she pushed the girl between the beautiful silken hangings, and fled that she might not know the next act in this tragedy.

After one quick look around the walls adorned with pictures of naked women, and riots of debauchery, her eyes in startled terror fled to the faces of the three women and four men in the room. Yes, the women have heard of her—the new beauty. Wildly the girl looked from face to face, as a Christian maiden in Nero's time may well have looked into the eyes of the beasts whose claws and teeth were soon to tear her shrinking, quivering flesh. Not a line of sympathy marked the faces of these men and women as they gazed upon the cowering girl, standing at bay, her back against the pillar supporting the arch spanning the entrance.

The three women looked upon her beauty and dreaded it. Her competition was to be feared. The four men looked upon her from eyes behind which a thousand generations of men have handed down to this age, with its white enamel of Christian professions, the law of the jungle, touching women.

Look at this sweet, white blossom of womanhood.

Come with me, all ye who pray—who call upon the name of God.

Come with me to Madame Vaughn's old red brick mansion, gray stone trimmed.

Stand there; under that picture.

No, my Puritan, lift your eyes! Look upon this daughter of a Christian land—by her mother named Estella. To-night a second baptism is to be hers—in the fires of a more than hell they will christen her—Norma Jordan.

Look! Her head has fallen upon her breast! As she stands with clinched hands before her, her finger-nails are eating into the pink of her skin to taste the sweet young blood before these wantons, these hellions of your greed-crazed age, shall suck it up drop by drop.

Each curve and swelling beauty of this, God's gift to earth, was designed to stir the appetite of a regal love. To bless a world. To hallow motherhood. These deep dyed blushes that come and go, over half concealed breasts that rise and fall as the head bends lower and lower—these are but the heralds of the coming fullness of womanhood—and here, wolves, human wolves, devour this beauty, and feast their eyes upon her flesh alone.

Call out to your God, O Christian! Call, and call yet again. That such things should stand, that this should be a part of the marketing, the profit-taking of our time.

But see! She totters. She sinks to the floor, and in her yielding limbs a thousand generations of outraged womanhood cry out for vengeance.

Joel Holdon sprang to his feet as Norma fell, and from one side looked up at a girl with bleached, straw-colored hair. "She's ill," he ventured, and the girl, laughing, replied:

"Come off. She's stringing you!"

At that moment Madame entered. Hastily surveying her boarders and their startled guests, she fell upon her knees beside Norma, and attempted to revive her. Looking up at Joel, who had asked, "Is this the girl?" she answered "Yes" and called for wine.

The wine, supplemented by Madame's efforts, soon

"——and here, wolves, human wolves, devour this beauty, and feast their eyes upon her flesh alone."—Page 164.

brought the girl to consciousness of her surroundings. Her first glance at Madame's face told her more plainly than words that her keeper was angry; that she must control herself and play the game to the limit she had set. The only thing between her and dishonor was the integrity of a man—and he must be put to the test.

"What was it, Norma?" The question was sweetly spoken, but Norma saw the Madame's eyes.

"I—I don't know," she faltered; then gathering her will, went on: "It won't happen again, I assure you."

Madame left the room as Joel took the girl by the arm and led her to the great fat davenport where but a short while ago a boy was destroyed.

Once more the interrupted revel is under way. The girl with the bleached straw hair has been called to the piano. The podgy millionaire and his mate of the tragic eyes are gone; so, too, the dark beauty lured from the Southland. But six remain. Joel, son of a mother whose life was one long prayer for him; whose sister has opened the floodgates of her heart night after night for him, sits upon the davenport beside the woman who is to prove him. His arm is about her waist, yet she dare not reprove him. He has captured her hands and, bending over her, his hot breath upon her, he demands a kiss as forfeit for the scare she gave him.

He has a right to ask this—in this place he need but ask and all must be given—as she realizes this her blood runs riot through her body, her senses swim—she lifts her beautiful face in pleading.

Her big, brown eyes with drooping lashes half hiding them, her blushes, her heaving bosom, all combining to make her ravishingly tempting, send the hungry jackals of passion leaping through his poisoned veins in wild clamor for their prey. Again and again his hungry lips devour the nectar of innocence. Norma hides her face, a shuddering fear filling her soul. Can she hold out against this man? Already the pain is half sweet. She must! She must! so she tells herself, and admits that if she is to last out the struggle against those burning eyes, those arms, those lips, those hands, the test must soon be had.

The girl at the piano swung around on the stool just in time to see Joel's last kiss, and the drooping head

with its glory of brown hair into which the lights threw rays of burnished copper. Her lips are curled in scorn. "He's a fool, and his new beauty is a simpering sissy. Just look at her playing the schoolgirl-come-on, and his being taken in by it. Well, I'll just put an end to this country spooning," she tells her lover, and asks aloud:

"Does Miss Jordan play?"

Joel repeated the question, and at Norma's almost inaudible answer arises and offers his arm.

"What shall it be?" Her eyes were lifted for a moment to the wall above that instrument of grand possibilities; the picture hanging there, seen at a glance, sends her eyes back to the ivory keys. Joel Holdon, son of what we denominate a Christian home, who to-night in a new baptism takes the name of James Y. Johnson, bends over the girl.

"Give us anything and you won't miss it," he whispers.

Slowly her fingers wander over the keys. She sits at home. Her first lover, a boy who went to school with her, stands at her side. Just behind in the dim light of the little home nest sit her mother and sister. Mechanically her mind directs her fingers to the old melodies; homely songs of a buried past; a time before our Christian homes were filled with songs from red-light districts set to ragtime. Still she is seeking something; the melodies she has found run through a few bars and die away—she has found it!

The grand piano responds; it quivers, and vibrates. The slave has lifted her eyes. No more that horrid picture; in its stead a picture not of pigments on canvas, but a spirit picture born of the torture of the hour, fills up the massive gilt frame above the piano.

All other sound in this parlor where Bacchus revels with drunken earth clods is stilled as a clear young voice rises and falls in unearthly sweetness and appeal.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee," the words swell grandly forth.

Joel clutched the side of the piano: "What sort of a song is this for such a place?" he asks himself.

Over yonder where the dark-eyed woman sat so short a time ago and offered a stranger all she could

possibly give, the girl with bleached hair now sits, her face buried in her hands.

A hard-visaged woman who has been discussing a "dope sheet" with her companion, sits staring at the girl as she ends the first stanza of the hymn. In a bound she reaches the piano before the second stanza is reached:

"What th' hell's th' matter with you? Think this 's a gospel shop?" she demands, roughly shaking the girl.

"Let her alone, Madge, a little of it won't hurt—" Joel begins.

"Let her alone nothin'! Look what she's doin' t' Fanny. Th' fool's blubberin' like a kid, and first we know she'll be havin' one of them spells."

Norma, released by the woman, slipped from the stool, and catching Joel by the arm, said: "Do please take me away. For God's sake take me out of this place."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BETRAYAL.

When Joel led Norma from the parlor to her room he tried to take her in his arms, but she eluded him. For the first time since she had been in the city she had the key to her room; she turned the key and faced the man. Again he attempted to take her in his arms.

"Wait, Mr. Johnson, I must tell you something," she panted.

"Oh, you're all right; I'll risk that."

"You don't understand." Upon her knees she lifted her sweet young face to him, and in her outstretched hands held up her virtue, her purity, her womanhood, and asked him to bless it in mercy.

"I am not what you think me. I was lured here, betrayed, deceived. Oh, Mr. Johnson, you can't know the awful things that have been threatened—you can not know what I have suffered! You are my one hope. Stay here to-night. You may have my bed, I will sleep on the floor in the bath room, anywhere. To-morrow come back and get me; take me out of this awful place; let me go home to my mother and sister. Do this for me, and God will bless you."

He heard her out; yes, every word, and if he had been a man of clean blood he could have given her but one answer. But here was game well worth the chase. He lifted her up and seated her upon a divan.

"My dear girl," he said, "don't you know that I could not take you away to-morrow?"

"Not take me away, and why?"

"Not one of the Madame's boarders leaves here, even for a drive, until Madame is sure they are safe."

"And this was my one hope!" the girl exclaimed. "Unless, unless you could protect me until Madame is satisfied!"

He had his arms about her. "My God, Norma, I

don't want to protect you for a month only; I want to protect you always."

She ceased to struggle; he reached up and drew her head down, down until he had almost touched her lips, when, with a cry, she freed herself.

"What am I doing? What am I doing?" she wailed as she put the length of the room between them.

"Nothing wrong, Norma, nothing wrong," he repeated, following her. "Come back and be a sensible little girl. Let us look this situation square in the face and see what we can do," he urged. When he had prevailed upon her to be seated he said: "Now see here, Norma, if I had come to your home and told you I loved you, you would have listened to me, wouldn't you?"

Remembering his lips, she whispered, "Yes."

"And after we had been engaged awhile we would have married, and—and you wouldn't talk about sleeping on the floor, or in the bath room, would you?" Again his arm encircled her waist. Blushing, she hung her head, but did not answer, and his hungry eyes caught fire again. "Now, how about the present case? I am sorry, of course, that Madame, or whoever it was, trapped you; but I am glad I was the one to find you, for I love you, I love you!" He smiled and winked at the great brass bedstead as the girl's head was drawn to his shoulder and lay there even when he slipped his hand down to the whiteness of her neck. "Now, it's up to us to make the best of things as we find them. If I could take you home to-morrow I would be back the day after trying to get you to marry me. I would carry you off and marry you to-morrow, you sweetest of women, so I don't see why you should ask me to wait a month, especially as I will have to stay with you at least half the time, if I am to hope to get you away at the end of that time."

Norma freed herself from his embrace and tried to read his face, his eyes. She was in desperate straits. Was this man to be trusted? If he could give up enough to come to her, protect her until they could leave this place together, could she risk everything upon a promise?

"Norma, you doubt me;" his voice carried reproach.

"You doubt me, while I, finding you here in such a place as this, and knowing nothing of your people or yourself, tell you I love you and offer to marry you as soon as I may safely take you away; still you doubt me."

"Oh, my God! I don't know what to do; I don't know what to do!" It was the cry of one tortured. As she tottered to the great east window the man smiled, but she saw only a serious face; when looking around at the sound of his voice, she heard him say:

"Norma, dear, why don't you do the thing that's easiest, the thing that will put your whole trouble on my shoulders. I am well-to-do for a young man; my family are in the lumber business (he was thinking of his father's offer of a position at one of the iron mines) and I am able to give you a good home."

"What do you want me to do?" she asked in an awed whisper.

"Do?" he repeated, going over to her. "Why, sweetheart, I want you to marry me before God to-night, and before men as soon as I can get you away from Madame's without kicking up a fuss."

Norma put her hand upon his shoulder, and it was covered in an instant by one of his. Her face as sweet, as firm as artists paint the face of the virgin, was turned to his.

"Mr. Johnson, I have told you my story. You say there is no escape from this place short of a month; that this woman must have her pound of flesh, that you cannot help me in any other than the way you have named?"

"I do." He is looking straight into her brown eyes.

"You tell me you love me; that you believe my story; that, if you could take me away from this—this place to-morrow, it would be to marry me?"

"I do." His passion played a very devil's dance in his eyes, but the girl saw only the ardor of a man who loves.

"You know what I will be exposed to if you should go from this room and tell Madame what I have told you? I want you to realize that I know I am powerless, that resistance is useless, that I am ready to yield

all, and now, rather than suffer as I have suffered in anticipation of this moment."

He tried to kiss her, but she held him back.

"Wait, wait," she pleaded. "Let me tell you all, then you may choose, and God help you. When we came into this room I had but one hope, and that was that I might touch your heart. My youth, my inexperience, all I was or am, this I threw at your feet. You offered me love and marriage, when you had the right to command my obedience to your will. If I refused you could consign me to such torture as only a pure woman may suffer at the hands of such men and women as brought me to this place. Do you still insist that you love me and will marry me as soon as you may take me away?"

"Norma, I love you, and I swear I will marry you. What more can you ask?"

The girl hears, and a beautiful face, illumined with all of hope, sweet beyond expression, is turned to the man, his arms reach out, and she offers her lips with a sigh that is both renunciation and sacrifice. Yet the beauty, purity, trust and adoration that shine in the depths of her eyes as she seeks to fathom the eyes of the man who, to her, is both prince and deliverer, will haunt him, even to death.

At ten the next morning Joel entered his father's office. To the clerk he said:

"Bill, go in and tell the governor I've come to see him about that mine proposition." To himself he added: "If he had the President in there, he'd drop him on that hint."

Five minutes later he and his father had come to an agreement. The father was elated, the son well satisfied. He would go up the next week and select a cage in some convenient place, not too far removed from his work, a cage in which to put the bird he had caught in the lime last night.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHARLEY HARRIS FINDS A JOB.

"Price, what did that young fellow want?" Horace Holdon inquired of his superintendent as he glanced at a young man who was slowly leaving the office.

"Oh, he has wheels," Price replied with a shrug.

"Well, he don't look it. What makes you think so? There he's stopped on the street, uncertain which way to go. What did you tell him?"

"I told him to call to-morrow. He wants work; said he'd almost do it for the privilege of studying our heavy casting work. He thinks he has something to cheapen the cost of moulding; I didn't ask what."

"Well, he is out there still. Will you send one of the clerks out and have him come in again? He looks both intelligent and capable to me."

Five minutes later Charley was laying before the Honorable Horace Holdon the future process of casting iron and other metals; he had a good listener. When he had finished the Honorable Horace, smiling, asked:

"Have you secured letters patent?"

"No, sir," the simple mechanic replied. "I have not built the perfected machine; that's the only reason I am in the city. I came here to build the machine."

"But you say you have given this machine a thorough trial, and have one of the castings produced, in fact, the first one produced, if I followed you?"

"Yes, sir, a perfect casting and the only changes I will make in the second machine will be to increase speed, make the machine more compact and build the flasks along new lines. As far as the working out of the principle is concerned, that is solved, and is perfect."

"Did you tell Mr. Price, the gentleman you talked

with a little while ago, what sort of a machine you had in mind?"

"No, sir, I only mentioned that I was working out a problem, and needed to get better acquainted with the work as it is done in a large plant before going further."

"I see. Avoid mentioning anything about your work to any one."

Holdon drummed upon his desk and did not speak again until the mechanic said:

"I certainly am grateful for the interest you have taken."

"Oh, that's all right, that's all right; I am willing to admit that I am both interested and curious—so much so that I would like to see the casting you made in your machine. Could you bring it up this afternoon?"

"Certainly; I would be pleased to," Charley replied with pride.

"Then come up at three o'clock, and you need not look farther for work. We will take care of you and give you every opportunity to study the business. In fact, a letter of introduction from me will give you a chance to inspect any plant in the city or anywhere else you may wish to push your investigations during your spare time."

So it was arranged that Charley should return with his precious memento of a first victory. Greatly rejoiced in finding such a sympathetic, whole-souled, generous employer, he went back to his hotel.

Mr. Holdon swung lazily in his office chair, selected a cigar, lit it and communed with himself.

"The fool has not even filed a caveat and don't intend to patent his machine until it is perfected. Well, well, well; suckers are born every minute. If that machine will do the work there's millions in it. And I have a shrewd guess as to who will handle those millions."

Touching a button at his elbow, a boy appeared.

"Tell Price I want to see him."

As the boy disappeared his mind went back to the alluring possibilities of a rapidly forming scheme.

"I've got to go about this carefully. Harris must be kept in the dark as to the possibilities of losing his

rights to patent, through a leak. He evidently thinks he must have the thing perfected before he can take steps to protect it, and he must keep on thinking so."

"You wanted to see me?" Price inquired, his head thrust in at the doorway. The employer answered cordially:

"Yes, come in. Price, that young fellow may have wheels, but from what he told me of his experience in foundries in smaller towns I should judge that he must be a good workman and an all around man at that."

"Well, that's encouraging."

"Yes. Well, he may prove valuable to us in more ways than one, and I want you to try him out. He wants to work and look about a bit."

"But we can't stand for that. Why, man alive, he may be one of the union's walking delegates, and by getting the run of the works he'd simply raise hell among the men. I tell you, Mr. Holdon, we can't be too careful. That cuss is not simple. I saw him when he left here after his talk with you and he looked—well—he looked like he had just pulled over a jack pot."

"Oh pshaw! Price. Your first little set-to with the labor unions is still on your nerves. They were too much for you."

"Not on your life," Price protested. "Next time I run up against the unions they may strike and be damned."

"Never mind, Price, never mind; let's get back to Harris. I will guarantee that he is not a union man, and if you handle him right, never will be. By the way, I wish you would go down to the Dredging Company this afternoon. Take Johnson or Kodetz, or both, and get the work started on those patterns. They are getting anxious. "Say," he called after the superintendent, "you can go down after dinner and save the extra trip out here."

Price's only comment on the substance of the interview was: "I wonder what the old man's trying to get out of that young fellow? I go down town after dinner to save a trip out here. First time in his life that he's thought of saving me an extra trip. I'll bet a horse that young Harris is coming back this afternoon and Holdon wants to keep me from getting next."

"Here, you, limpy, come here!" he called to a crippled roustabout. As he came up Price held out a quarter. "Need it, Crips?"

"Bet yer life, but do I git it?"

"Yes, you get it. Come with me." Outside the gates upon the side street lay a pile of brick. "I want you to work here from one o'clock until I get back from downtown. Stack the brick in a nice pile. There'll be another load along in an hour or two after dinner. I want you to watch for a young man of about twenty-five, as tall and about the same build as myself. He wears a brown suit, tan shoes and a light soft hat, and——"

"Oh, that's th' guy stopped me dis mornin' an' wanted to know wus dis de place——"

"So you would know him again?"

"Couldn't miss him, boss. Say, he's new to dis life; talks as good—why, he's de real candy. Wanted to know how was me mudder, and asks me hav' I got kid relatives. No, I couldn't possibly miss him," Mickey Dougherty concluded with a broad grin.

"Well, here's the money in advance. Not a whisper to any one, but just keep your eye peeled. If he shows up and goes into our office you keep tab on how long he stays, and—well, that's all."

Mickey's wink at the billboard across the street was expressive. "Wonder w'at th' 'ell's on? I ain't never looked fer Price to tip me to shadder th' old man. An' th' young guy; I hopes they ain't a-goin t' do nothin' t' him—he's pure sugar."

Mickey's labor was not in vain. At a few minutes to three o'clock the young man in the light hat came up the side street, carrying under his arm a parcel wrapped in newspaper.

"Hello, youngster," was his greeting, as he halted beside the pile of brick. "Got a light job to-day, eh?"

"Yep, considerable light an' good pay," Mickey replied, winking repeatedly at the brick in his hands.

"Guess I'm going to work with you after a while," Charley volunteered as he sauntered on toward the office.

An hour later he reappeared with his parcel neatly wrapped in a different sort of paper, to find Mickey

working like a Trojan to get the few remaining bricks corded.

Both the Honorable Horace Holdon and Charles Harris are satisfied, and we should be. Mickey is satisfied, for he has a second quarter to jingle against the first since he reported to Price. Price is the only dissatisfied member of the quartette.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRST ALARM.

"Say, Prof., they say Stella Davis ain't sent a word home the two weeks she's been to the city," the postmaster announced to Professor Saunders as the latter stood at the "General Delivery" window shortly after school hours one Friday afternoon.

"Haven't heard from her?" the Professor questioned, knitting his brows. "Why, that can't be true. Anna told me the other day that Estella was getting along all right."

"Well, it's against orders; but, by gum, I'm a-goin' to do it, government or no government! I tell you there hasn't been a line come to this office in more'n two weeks—facts are, they got a postal card the day after she left, an' that she writ on th' train, an' if they've heard any more it's been telegraphed."

"That's easy found out," the Professor answered, thoughtfully, "and as for Estella, I tell you if they haven't heard from her there's something wrong."

He had turned to go when the postmaster said: "No need of going over to see the operator. I saw him just before you came in, an' he says there hasn't been no telegrams gone up to the Davis' house since some one telegraphed to Stella before she went away."

"Well, some one ought to go up and see Mrs. Davis if that's the case."

"Just what I've been thinkin' for a week—but them wimmen are so proud, you can't tell how they'd take it. Why, Ann comes in here, looks in their box after every mail, and just draws her lips tight an' answers those that question her and digs out—but I tell you it's wearing on her, and somethin' ought to be done."

By this time a half-dozen neighbors had stopped and were listening to the conversation.

"If it isn't too late," the Professor's voice was low,

"I know something of the ways of the world, and if the girl has been in the hands of some people I have heard of, the angels of heaven couldn't save her, but," he turned to those who had gathered, "not a word of any of this until we have seen Mrs. Davis. Now, who will go with me and get at the truth of this report that the family have not heard from her since she went to Chicago?"

"Oh, there's nothing to that report," a neighbor of the Davis family spoke. "Mrs. Davis told my wife only yesterday that Stella was well."

"Just some old woman's gabble," another announced.

But one man in the crowd edged his way to the Professor's side and whispered to him to agree with the men—it would keep the story from spreading. He added that as soon as they could get away without being observed he would accompany the teacher to the Davis home.

Thus it fell out that the two women, while sorrowfully preparing the evening meal, were surprised by the advent of visitors—each of whom had more than a passing interest in the family, as will shortly develop.

"Good evening, Henry, and you, too, Professor. Come right in." Even as she spoke this greeting to her guests the mother's lips quivered. Did these men know that Estella had forgotten her old home? That the glamour of city life had so turned her head that she even refused to answer any of their letters? Had some one been to the city? the tortured mother wondered.

Anna met the Professor with stony eyes. He had not been to call upon her since before Estella went away, and in her heart had crept the thought that he might have been courting her in order to be near her sister. She could not guess that he had noted a change in her manner toward him even before Estella went away, and thought she had become ambitious to follow Estella to the city, and consequently did not care to encourage his suit.

Both men were ill at ease, after they had exhausted the small talk wherewith we mortals attempt to bridge over the uncomfortable and oft recurring chasms abounding in the land where all fear to be misunderstood. "What business have I to pry into the hidden

griefs and hurt prides of this family," each asked himself, and each decided that women who had no men folks of their own to look after them couldn't take a bit of neighborly interest amiss, even though there was nothing in the rumor.

According to agreement Henry, the older man, was to keep Mrs. Davis engaged in a discussion of current events until the Professor had sounded Anna. It took several nudges, and sundry winks, to start the Professor on his mission, but finally he mustered courage to ask Anna to step out on the porch with him, as he had something important to talk over with her.

As she followed him, pale-faced and wondering, her mind was busy framing an excuse for not listening to him, but he did not give her time to utter a word before he plunged into his subject.

"Anna," he began, as soon as they were out the door. "I have been all you would let me be to you ever since I came to this town—why didn't you come to me with your trouble.?"

The girl shrank back among the wild cucumber vines that girdled the porch, but did not reply.

"I know," the man went on, "that Estella has not answered any of your letters."

"How do you know?"

"That does not matter—it is the truth—and you foolish women for some cause, to me an enigma, are keeping silent when Estella's life, her very honor, may be in danger."

"Oh, John," the girl gasped and caught at him for support. "I've been afraid of that, but it is only mother's pride that's hurt—she does not suspect, and I dare not tell her of my half-formed fears—a mention of that would kill her. Oh, John, how could I know? I thought you had ceased—had ceased to—to care—you——"

"And you," he replied, kissing her despite a protest, "you made me wretched. How could I know, when you deliberately lied to me? Oh, Anna, how could you! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I foolishly promised mother not to say a word to any one. Poor mother believes that Estella has forgotten us, and recounts stories she has read about

children who left home and were so enamored of their new surroundings that they didn't want to even hear of the old homes—and because this is the easiest, safest thing to believe, I have tried to accept it, but——"

"But you are both very foolish, if you will pardon me for being so blunt, to harbor such a thought of Estella for a moment."

"I know it, John. I know it. Will you go to the city and find her for us? She always liked you," the girl blushed and looked down. Professor John Saunders, unable to resist the temptation, gathered her into his arms and was trying to tell her that he would go to the ends of the earth for her when Mrs. Davis came to the door. At sight of the tableau on the back porch she threw up her hands:

"Land of love. If I ever! Why, Professor Saunders!" were the exclamations that brought Henry to her side, and at the same time caused the Professor to look up with a rather sheepish smile, then to whisper to the girl, whose face was hidden on his shoulder: "There's but one way to explain, and it's the way I've wanted to explain things to your mother for more than a year." And he said aloud, that those standing in the doorway might hear: "Mrs. Davis, I love your daughter—may I have her?"

"Land a mercy. Isn't that a slick way of getting around an old lady? John Saunders, why didn't you bring the rest of the neighbors in, and tell it right out before them all?'

"I wouldn't be ashamed to tell the whole world," John stoutly protested, while he pressed Anna closer and she hung her head lower to hide her blushes.

"Well, I ain't got a word to say—when a girl stands afore her own mother, an' a stranger, as you might call Henry here, an' lets a man hug her, an' she don't seem in no ways bashful about it—I should judge that I ain't got nothing to say."

"Mother!" There was a world of reproach in Anna's voice as she lifted a radiant though tear-stained face from her lover's shoulder.

After the mother and Henry had left them Anna turned to her lover: "John," she said, "I ought to be

ashamed of myself for being so happy—if you love me, go. Don't telegraph, don't say a word to any one."

"But the postmaster, operator, and Henry know—and the Lord only knows how many more have the news by this time," he protested.

"Then there is all the more reason why you should hurry. In a week's time think how many stories will be abroad."

"I will go to-night," he answered, and kissed her despite her struggles, protesting that he deserved much for all the doubts he had carried in his heart for the weeks since he had imagined she had ceased to care for him.

"Say, by gum, you're the bully boy with th' glass eye all right, John Saunders," Henry Weaver observed as soon as they were out on the street, and enlarged upon his statement as follows: "Perfectly smooth, perfectly smooth. Had the old lady in a corner where she had to either come up to the trough or jump the fence, and as for th' young lady—well, from th' way you was hangin' onto her it seemed to me that it was as well that she didn't try to yank herself loose. If she had——"

"If she had I would have caught her again," the Professor answered, laughing; and then in a serious tone took up the discussion of ways and means for the prosecution of his city trip. Before they had reached the postoffice where the postmaster was anxiously awaiting them, it had been agreed that both should go to the city.

Upon arrival in the city, Weaver and Saunders first sought the address given by the firm with whom Estella was supposed to be employed. The number was found to tally with a hole in the ground on West Madison street, and they were advised to lose no time in presenting their case to the police. So they hastened to a downtown station and laid their case before the officer in charge.

"But, my dear sir," the sergeant protested, "you should have come to us with this case two weeks ago. In fact, we should have known of this unprotected girl's arrival in the city. It's pretty late in the day to undertake an investigation and give you any promise

of reaching her. You say the address at which she was supposed to work is that of a vacant lot? Of course, it was a regular plant."

"How about the letters her folks have written each day?" This from the Professor.

"Oh, they'd see that that end of it was fixed for a while at least, but I'll send a man over to the office and find out about her mail as soon as I have one to spare, and we'll put a couple of good men on the case." He paused and seemed buried in thought for a time, then looking up, asked: "Did you bring much money with you? I've found that it is often advisable on cases of this kind to have outside help from some of the detective agencies, and, of course, the city can't be expected to put up for that kind of work," he went on to explain.

"Sure, we brought some of the needful along, and if it costs five hundred dollars, we can put it up without going back to the cellar for more," Weaver announced, to the surprise of the Professor, who thought that all they would need in the way of cash was enough to pay hotel bills.

"That's the talk," the officer assured them. "Now you gents just give me your hotel address—haven't got that far yet? Well, I'll fix you out, and you may expect to hear from me almost any time." He drew a pad to him, scribbled a note, placed it in an envelope, licked the flap, sealed it, penciled a superscription and handed the envelope to John.

"Give that to Mr. Holtz and you will be well taken care of—yes, the Holtz House is just around the corner and one block south—you can't miss it. It's a good place. Good-day, gents."

On the way to the Holtz House, Henry exploded. "Why, John," he exclaimed, "that brute talked as cool as if we had only lost a yearling calf, confound him! Set there and never even blinked when you told him the villains had put up such a game on an innocent girl. Why, damn that man, his looks alone would get him hung in a decent neighborhood if they were looking for a criminal. And him directing the police force! Why, man, he's a drunkard, and he's dirty, and his eyes——. John Saunders, you never want on your soul what I

saw in that man's eyes. I wonder if there ain't some other police shop we can go to? One where there is a decent man in charge?"

"No use kicking now," the Professor insisted. "Our case will be booked and have every attention. And you're wrong if you think that officer directs the police force. He's a sort of clerk to the department; enters up the cases and reports them to the central station."

"Suppose he don't report our case? I tell you, John, I wouldn't trust that man half as far as I could throw old Baker's bull by the tail; another thing, I'd like to know what's inside that envelope he gave you; if I had it I'd see—but, I reckon, you couldn't be induced?"

"Not me," the Professor answered, laughing, and remarked: "It wouldn't need to be sealed so far as I am concerned."

"All right, we'll go to this Mr. Holtz hotel, but you can bet that this chicken isn't going to turn himself over to the police department, not entire. I've heard some things about them since I've been on earth this time that makes me fairly hungry to see what's inside that envelope;" he looked hard at John, but as that gentleman did not appear to be of a yielding disposition where his integrity was touched, Henry closed the discussion with this observation: "Anyway, I'm going to keep my eye peeled, and I'd advise you to forget there ever was a God while you are on this case, and you'll be better able to discuss business with the average man we'll run up against in this city."

There were but few guests in the office of the Holtz House when John handed the note Sergeant Mike had given him to the sleek youth who stood behind the desk. This young gentleman, who sported two well-grown "Alaskan Diamonds," and parted his abundant crop of hair into two fluffy mats of black, took the envelope, and after looking carefully at the address, called: "Martin, Oh, Martin; here's a note from Mike!"

Martin Holtz, a rotund little man of middle age, who supported a long-established baldness, and saw things through a pair of sharp black eyes, waddled around behind the counter, examining the men from the country at his leisure as he went. He took the note from the clerk, glanced at it for a moment, then at the visitors,

read it through, swung the register around, and reached out a hand. "Glad to see you, gentlemen. Yes, register there; how long will you stay? Oh, that's all right. We'll fix you out all right." To the clerk, he said, in an undertone: "You'd better hunt Bill up; I'll stay here till you get back."

As the visitors moved away from the desk, Holtz took out the note and read it again.

"Martin: I'm sending you two from the grass. The old fellow's the candy. Take good care of him. The other guy's a preacher. They're here on a girl hunt. Send Bill over, I want to see him at once. Mike."

The particular "Bill" Sergeant Mike wants to see deserves more than passing attention. He is one of those combination errand boys, hangers-on, go-betweens and confidential agents employed by the grafting statesmen, the bribe-taking policeman and the business man looking for a chance to lose his money and his virtue. The number of "Bills" grow and fatten as public morals decay. The individual "Bill" under discussion wears clothes up to the limit of his rake-off from week to week. Raiment with him is not a fixed possession, to be worn until worn out—last month he appeared at one of the downtown hotels in full regalia of a gentleman of fashion; wore a high hat, sported diamonds, and took his meals at the "Annex." This month his headquarters are at the "Holtz," and his fine plumage of last month lies on a shelf at "Uncle's." Until something worth while turns up, this cog in the great American Politico-graft Machine must content himself with a "Dicer" and clothes in keeping; all braced by a brave show of "phony" jewels—worn to make a "front" before those from the green country who bring with them the real long green of commerce.

Here comes our particular "Bill." His eyes are ever on the move, cunning, restless, daring. Yes, daring. When a coward knows a mischance but loses him a victim, knows that behind him all the machinery of crime and a goodly part of the State's machinery for the detection of crime is ready to offer him asylum—why should he fear? When he went up to the desk and asked what was wanted, after reading the note, he simply remarked

that it looked good; then turning to survey the room asked: "Where's the blokes?"

* * * * * *

"The thing that surprised me," John was saying, as the two sat apart in the lobby of Holtz Hotel, "is your interest in this case, Henry. Is there anything back of it?" Henry Weaver let his eyes rest upon the throng passing upon the opposite side of the street. He did not move for what seemed to John an hour. When he did look at his companion, his face was alight.

"Yes," he admitted. "There's something behind it; a good deal behind it." Hesitating again, his blue eyes sought the opposite side of the street. When next he turned to John it was to say: "I never told a soul in my life, Professor, and I never expected to, but bein's you and me is hooked up in this case, and bein's how I'm going to stay with it until I know what's happened to Stella, I'm going to tell you." Again he hesitated. "Provided you promise never to say a word."

"On my honor."

"Then here goes. When Grace Ward was a-goin' on fifteen, I went to work for one of the neighbors and I planned from the first time I seen her to have that gal. Times I lost hope, an' again I'd perk up some. She was as lively as a cricket, and didn't need to do anything but refuse the first half-dozen fellows as asked her to go anywhere, always knowin' they'd be as many more waitin' the chance. That went on for three years, and most of the boys got kind of tired, but I stuck to it, and either went with Grace or went alone. Well, at the end," he knocked the ashes from his pipe and leisurely refilled it, "at the end of the three years I seemed to have things my own way and was happy. Why, man, I wouldn't have traded my buckboard and little fly mare and my hope of finally bringing Grace to say 'Yes' for all the world. Then big Jim Davis, from over the river, got sight of my song bird." He fell silent again, the Professor was looking straight out at the building over the way. "Yes, I took her to him. It was this way: I'd heard they was having a rip-roarin' revival over to the Zion church on the other side of the river, 'bout twelve miles from the corner where Grace's folks lived, an' I was so proud of Grace and

my rig, it was sleighing and I had a cutter, that I wanted to show off, and Grace was a sight to see; plump, rosy-cheeked, big brown eyes, and the sweetest laugh. Well, we went. I left her standin' at the gate while I put the horse up, then we went in and stood by one of the big stoves while Grace unwrapped. My, but I was proud! Nothing there could beat her, and that was the trouble. We went back to a seat and it just happened that the usher showed us into a long pew almost full. Grace went in ahead and sat down by the man she married three months later. He looked at her with all his eyes, and whispered to me about one thing and another, but all the time he kept looking at Grace. When the meeting was over he helped me get my horse and tucked Grace in; by that time he knew where she lived and a good deal more. Grace seemed sort of quiet going home, but two nights later, she wanted to go back and I didn't, but we went. And as sure as I live that Jim Davis was a-waitin' t' help her out and I guess he asked her whilst I was putting the horse away if he couldn't come and see her; anyway, he came, and I put up a losin' fight; but I tell you I stuck to it to the last. I remember one night in the early spring I went over to Wards' and Grace sent word down that she was sick, but I stayed because I knew her mother liked me, and didn't like Davis. Finally Grace came downstairs and just stuck her head into the door and said: 'Henry, I want to see you a minute; only a minute.' 'Only a minute?' I says, 'when I've been waiting hours?' She tried to laugh, but didn't make much of it, and when we were out on the porch she up and told me she'd promised to marry Jim Davis, and it was coming off in a month."

The Professor turned his keen eyes upon the older man.

"Well, Professor, I suppose I ought to have just been completely hornswaggled, but I warn't. I'd know'd she couldn't hold out against such lovin' as big Jim Davis put up. I knew I loved her better; I knew that; but I couldn't take her in my arms and just squeeze the breath out of her and kiss her a dozen times and her a sayin' 'Don't, don't, don't' every time she could get her breath. That's the way big Jim loved her, and got her; and I loved her so much I couldn't go agin her

word, even when I knew she didn't mean it, and I lost her. When she told me and I didn't seemed surprised, she looked at me kind of funny and said: 'I thought you loved me?' Then, I seemed to sense that it was all over, and I just caught her up in my arms and kissed her and told her how I had always loved her, and if big Jim ever kissed her oftener or hugged her harder it was because he was a bigger man, and she never said 'don't' once." The narrator drew a hand across his mouth and chuckled. "Well, when I let her go she looked up at me the queerest and says: 'Henry, why didn't you do that before?' 'Because I have been fool enough to believe you didn't want me to, not because I didn't want to,' I answered. She patted me on the shoulder and said: 'Never mind, Henry, there's half a dozen nice girls in this neighborhod who will jump at the chance of marrying you.' Then I told her there would never be another woman in this world given the chance to say either 'Yes' or 'No' to me, and I meant it. Well, Jim married her and in a couple of years they moved to the new town, when the railroad went through, but he never done well, though he did love Grace and the babies. When they'd been married about ten years, I went over to the town to live and to look after some property I had there. Then Jim died and I helped straighten things out, and got the family into the little home they have."

"Why in the world didn't you marry the widow?" the Professor asked.

"Well, that was the queer part of it," Henry admitted, in a low voice. "First off I thought to myself as soon as Grace got kind of quieted down I'd go over and kind of commence where we'd left off out on her folks' porch away back there, but the more I thought of it the more I found I'd quit loving her right there and then. I'd just been a good friend since, that's all. Well, I went over several times, intendin' each time to see if I couldn't get the old feelin' back, but I'll be hornswaggled if it 'ud come. I'd just plum as lief gone out and kissed her cow, mind you," he looked up to frown. "Grace Davis is a plum good-looking woman, only I loved a girl, a bright-faced, brown-eyed girl, with dimpled chin and the reddest cheeks and lips, the same as I kissed that night on the porch; and seems it don't matter how

old I grow, my love always stays young." Again silence fell. Bill sauntered by, took their measure and went on to report. "Been a long time getting around to present time; eh, Professor?" Henry smiled.

"What?"

"I say it's takin' me a long time to tell what brought me into this case, but I was layin' a proper foundation, as them lawyer chaps keeps a-sayin' in court." The pipe was out again; slowly this ever-young old lover of fifty-five refilled it, and when its glow had been revived he settled back in the big rocker. "Seems like a fool thing to say, and I tell you beforehand that I ain't no excuses to offer, and ain't never had no hopes nor nothin'. But, I've loved Stella ever since she put on dresses to her shoe tops."

"Loved Estella?" The Professor turned square around. "Loved Estella?" he repeated, to which Henry nodded, and blew a ring whirling and dipping toward the lighter currents of air above.

"Them's the words, Professor. She's the duplicate of what her mother was as a girl, only she's got all of Jim Davis' rock-bottom principles along with her mother's body and spirits." He looked closely at the Professor. "But, John, you want to understand that I haven't been no fool. I knowed this love of mine was billed to the same port as the old one; besides, I'd never have the chance to stand on no back porches with her, but I jest naturally worship the ground she walks over, and I don't ask nothin' else. If I'd had the gumption of a louse when I was courting her mother, Stella would of been my daughter, and, well, maybe that would of been too much happiness for one man."

"I wish to God Estella was your wife to-night," John answered.

"Do you now?" the other questioned, with an odd smile. "Well, John, it's too much to ask and I'm not asking anything, but as true as I believe in God, I don't give up the hunt until I find her or them that's made away with her." He arose, his clinched hands tight gripped. "I ain't up to date on city ways, even if I have seen some of the world, and I'm suspicious we ain't started right, but by the Holies, John, I ain't got nothin' else to live for, but that poor innocent child."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A COUNTRYMAN HELD UP.

Mike, police sergeant, protector of morals, guide to the ignorant and guardian of innocence, had not waited patiently the appearance of Bill Jenks. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," even in the skinning of "greens;" therefore his face expressed even more of satisfaction than his grunt, when Bill stepped into the station.

"What's on?" the latter demanded abruptly.

"If it's worked right, there's plenty on," Mike assured him and asked, "did you see the guys?"

"Sure thing; put my lamps on 'em the minute I got into the house, but what's the lay?"

"That's easy. You see, Bill, a girl comes to town about two or three weeks ago and gets pinched by one of the 'board of trade,' and her sorrowing parents sends these two guys with a roll of money and the girl's photograph in here today."

"Well, it's a cinch they wouldn't know the girl by her photo if they found her now," Bill winked knowingly. "Not if Fagan——"

"Cut it Bill!" Mike's hand fell upon "Bill's" mouth with some emphasis. "What th' hell you want to mention names here for?"

"Beg pardon," the other stammered; "I forgot."

"An' you ain't got nothin' to do but remember—see? If you're going to see this lead to the end you want to be always on the lookout." Bill nodded acquiescence, and Mike proceeded. "I've turned the case in regular and everything will be according to specifications, but the guys, bein' apt to git restless while the department's tryin' to git started, I want you to fix up a little entertainment on the side for the missionaries. Suppose you git a couple of th' boys to go over to the hotel and offer to help them find the girl; they can explain how slow we

are over here. Oh, I don't need to tell you that don't I? Get two good men; have them fixed so these guys couldn't swear to them in case of a slip up, then go down to one of the women on that list and fix with her to have the farmers visit there with the fly-cops and when they ask after Estella Davis, why put up a good song and have them promise to produce her, say tomorrow night, for five hundred dollars. If it's worked right, they will bite like the bedbugs in the hold-over. Now, git out and git the thing moving. I get two hundred dollars, you get one hundred and the woman gits two hundred. Now mosey and earn the money. There'll be more where that comes from before we get through with the case," Mike assured Bill as the latter left the little coop-like office.

In two hours, under directions from Desk Sergeant Mike, the machinery of crime had been oiled, the net spread, and all made ready. After supper, the oily clerk tapped Henry on the shoulder.

"Is this Mr. Saunders?" he inquired.

"No, that's the chap." Henry pointed a thumb toward a lone figure at a window.

"A telephone call for you, Mr. Saunders." The oily clerk, with a face full of pimples and a head full of sin, slipped back to the counter. John went to the phone.

"Is this Mr. Saunders?"

"Yes, who is this?"

"Police department may want you at any time from now up to 12 o'clock. keep close to the hotel."

"All right, thanks; am glad to know you have things moving."

"Oh, she's moving some," Mike answered before hanging up the receiver, and John wondered what it was that induced a laugh at the other end.

"Henry, they've got things moving some over at headquarters; just keep your eyes open." Henry looked up at the professor and smiled. "I'm a-giving them gents something to look at. They been here 'bout half an hour, an' as near as I can figure, they want to make my acquaintance, an' maybe yours, too."

"But, why are you counting all that money?"

"Countin' it? Cause it seems to do them chaps a power of good to watch me. Look into that mirror right in front of me, an' see 'em both in there jest as plain."

"I don't see what you're driving at, Henry." The professor was both puzzled and anxious.

"Why, I'm settin' stakes to tie a couple of tin-horn sports to, that's what. Think I been from Bangor, Me., to the City of Mexico, and up the coast to Alaska, and circulatin' around through the interior of Denver, Kansas City, and St. Louis, to come into this metropolis to be robbed, shanghaied, sandbagged, badgered, doped or any of them things?" He went on counting his money quietly and as naturally as though he were safe at home. A fat leather bill-book lay upon a chair beside him, while in his hands were bills of various denominations. John leaned over the back of his chair, not the least interested spectator by any means.

The two men who were on watch, the oily clerk and several other gentlemen, amongst them some honest men, were being attracted to the money center, when Henry quietly took a pile he had counted off, doubled it up and shoved it into a vest pocket.

"I reckon that ought to be enough to bring them, an' if they want any more—" he got up, "well, they'll come after it I reckon. Let's go an' take a look at our bunk."

When the two were in their room, Henry shook his fist at the Professor, saying, "I wish I had taken that letter away from you. You can say what you please, but I tell you that police officer an' this hotel ain't healthy people or places for greenhorns. An' I'll bet you——"

"For heaven's sake, man, don't talk so loud; they can hear you all over the house," John pleaded.

"I reckon that's right," Henry admitted. "But, I'll be hornswaggled if I ain't gettin' mad inside. Why, when them two gents came in, they took special pains to examine every man there, an' when they took us in they made signs. I seen it all in that mirror. When you went over to telephone, they grinned and kept an eye on me. Then, I made up my mind to jest draw them out. That's why I was a countin' money so all-fired promiscuous when you come back."

"See here, Henry;" John's voice was serious. "I can't put up any argument against what you say, because I don't know any more of the world than a—well, than any other country boy. I've been in the school room

since I was 5 years old, but if you are right, let's get away; there are lots of hotels."

"Not for me," the other exclaimed; then catching the professor by the shoulders, he asked, "see anything that looks like quit in my eyes? I never in my life refused to give a man value received, an' I've gone up against all the games they've got. Why, John, if I had on city clothes them guys, who's a waiting for us down in the office, would just take a sneak. It's the clothes they see, an' if they want to see more, I'm a-going to show them a man the clothes didn't make."

"You're not going to run into danger, when we have this case on hand, are you?"

"John, I haven't said anything to you about my suspicions, and I don't want to now. But I believe the only way to find a trace of Stella is to run into danger as you call it."

"Then you don't believe——"

"Don't ask me what I don't or do believe; you keep close to the police. I'm going to keep close to them fellers down in the office, if it costs a thousand dollars."

A bell rang; the indicator pointed to visitors, and the two went down to the office. Henry went to the desk, another clerk, the night man, had come on duty.

"A couple of gentlemen—there they are over by the long table—called for you." The guest turned, and followed by John, went over to the long table.

"Are you the gentlemen?" John inquired.

"Well, that depends," one of the men answered. "We are detectives, and our agency discovered"—he handed each a card—"that a disappearance case had been given to the police today. If you are the parties who are in the city to prosecute an investigation, we are certainly anxious to make your acquaintance."

During this speech, the Professor had stood as one stunned. These were the men he had seen in the mirror earlier in the evening.

"You fellers certainly know your business," Henry began. "You certainly do; and what might I call you?"

The man who had not spoken, now got into the game.

"This is Mr. Johnson, and my name is Brown, just plain Brown," with a smile.

"An' this is Professor Saunders; and my name's Weaver, gents; let's set down and talk things over."

Seated, the four were soon deep in the discussion of the case on hand.

"While I haven't a word to say against the police," Brown informed them, "I must insist that they have so much routine work on hand that this sort of case don't get the attention it should."

"I more than suspected that," Henry agreed.

"I'm glad you appreciate the situation," Brown continued; "and I assure you our agency goes at things of this sort differently, why, it's our business."

"How much would it cost us to have you two men on the case?" the Professor inquired.

"Well, that depends upon how we work. You see, the agency has detailed us on this case. If we make a bargain with you to-night, we simply report the terms and go ahead."

"Gee whiz! They must trust you two," Henry observed, and he did not fail to catch an expressive look passed between them.

"Yes, they trust us. In fact, we are the best men on the force; isn't that about it, Brown?" said Johnson.

"About it," Brown admitted.

"Now, as to terms," he went on. "We could not take up the case for less than thirty dollars per day."

"Thirty dollars? Why, we can't pay any such price as—" the Professor began, when Henry nearly took his breath by declaring:

"Well, gents, you're hired," and reaching into a vest pocket, he extracted some bills. "Here's the money that pays you up to this time tomorrow night."

The detectives were almost as much surprised as the Professor. Before they had recovered, Henry was saying:

"Now, we got started; just you two remember, I've got one thousand dollars for each of you on the side, the day you put me and my niece in the same room, if it's only for ten minutes. An' remember this, too, I'm going to have enough money here by the middle of next week to see this thing through; so it's up to you to get busy. An' here's the plan we go to work on. You two get thirty dollars every night as long as I am satisfied

you're working. If you find the girl by next Monday and bring her to a place in the city I'm going to pick out, you each get one thousand dollars besides your wages. If you get her by next Saturday you get seven hundred, and if it takes two weeks you only get five hundred dollars."

The two detectives looked at each other in a manner that conveyed to each, the fact that the other was completely at sea.

Turning to Henry, Brown said: "Mr. Weaver, your offer is a most liberal one, and there are some features about it that are—are, well, are unprecedented. If you gentlemen have no objection I should like to have a private conversation with my partner," but he hesitated. "Would you mind producing proof that you can pay this reward or bonus on the spot?"

For answer, Henry took from a pocket a bunch of letters and books, amongst them a bank book, showing a deposit of six thousand dollars with the Corn Exchange Bank.

"Now go and have your confab, and come back as soon as you can," he admonished them as they got up. "And in the meantime, as the contract ain't closed, why just hand me that retainer."

The detectives reached into their pockets, extracted the bills and left the lobby. When they were gone, John seemed to wake from a dream.

"What does this mean, Henry? I never heard any one call you a rich man, but you certainly——"

"Have just tended to my own business. Why John, what's money to me? I could give them two devils ten thousand dollars and never blink, if they'd only get Stella back."

"But, I thought you were afraid of them; thought they were crooks?" the puzzled professor protested.

"So I was; an' so I do," the other affirmed. "An' I was bound to show them that this time, at least, there'll be more money in it for them ten times over, if they help us, than they could get by tryin' to skin me."

"Mr. Saunders is wanted at the police station," the night clerk announced. "I hope you have your way with them, and Henry I want to thank you."

"Now, you go along, I ain't doing nothin' but making

myself happy in circumventin' some folks and a-helping others, but don't you breathe a word." Henry pushed him away.

In the wine room back of the hotel bar, two men were staring hard at each other over their beer glasses. Each anxious to be sure the other would agree to accept the offer Mr. Weaver had made them, which meant breaking with those who were slated to divide up all the money they might bunco him out of, or steal from him. To go in to win this one thousand each, they must play a double game. Both were hungry as starved wolves for this pile, dangled before them, and they felt confident, each of his ability to find the girl and that within twenty-four hours. Yet, neither dared speak. The beer glasses were emptied and refilled, and still not a word.

"This can't last always," Johnson managed to say after a third glass. The other looked at him keenly.

"Shall we toss a coin? Heads we go in for the big stake, tails, we play Mike's game." He extracted a dollar from his pocket, then Johnson put a hand over the coin.

"If I could trust you," was all he said.

"I don't owe Mike a cent," Brown answered.

"Then put up the coin! Here's my hand, and may the devil fly away with me if we don't win that thousand. But how about Mike? He'll expect his two hundred plunks first off, Monday morning. He knows the man's got 'em and we're supposed to take 'em away from him."

"I know that," Johnson replied, "and I'm working my head overtime. Oh, if we could just lay the plant out before Mr. Weaver, but that 'ud be asking too much. I can't see the way out now; anyway, we have until to-morrow night."

"Well, let's go up and cinch the thing. It's too good to lose; and say; if we get next to the girl by to-morrow, well, we can divide the money and give Mike what he asked."

Henry Weaver sat dreaming of many things after his detectives and the Professor had gone; the girl he had loved, the daughter who had taken her place in his heart, then of the men who had gone to some quiet spot to rearrange the game to suit the conditions he had proposed.

He knew his bid was higher than any that had been offered them by those who employed them to rob him. He argued that even these men would prefer to be honest and deal on the square if the money consideration was greater on the side of honesty than the reward offered for dishonesty. He also knew if these men were in league with criminals and could be won over to his cause, they would be the best servants he might choose. He was still dreaming of the days to come, days in which he might enjoy seeing this old, new love of his living in comfort, when the detectives returned. Johnson was spokesman for the pair.

"Mr. Weaver, we have decided to take your offer, but would like to have you extend the time on that one thousand dollars until Tuesday. You see, this is a case that may take more time."

"Make it Tuesday, gents; make it Tuesday, and remember, I'm ready to make it even a greater inducement for you to hustle; I want this girl tomorrow, if possible, the next day sure, and you get five hundred dollars extra, five hundred for each of you, if the girl is found by Monday. The one thousand dollars holds good until Tuesday evening. It's one thousand five hundred each in cold cash if you get her by Monday night."

"One thousand five hundred each!" Johnson exclaimed. "Well, Brown, we don't want to waste any time now." Both men arose.

Weaver took out his fat bill book. "Gents," he said, "I reckon ready money's as strong a talker where you are going to look for Stella as it is on Wall street, and I want you to be in shape to meet any argument."

The two looked at each other in a way that said: "This is the limit," and said it plainly. Brown tried to get his faculties to work and failed. Johnson rubbed his hands and smiled, but seemed at a loss for words.

"Boys, I've been 'round the world an' know about all the games man or woman gets up against." Henry stood facing the two. "An' I want you two to understand tonight that I'm prepared to play this game to the limit. I want this little girl; I know about what's happened to her. If she's alive, I want her; if she's dead, I am a-going to have revenge on them that murdered her. I can pay you more to help me than them that's hiding her

will pay you to help them keep her and rob me." Both men held up protesting hands. "That's all right," Henry went on, "that's all right, I ain't askin' questions. All I want from you is a square deal. If you had a job planned and ought to carry it out in order to keep the others in the dark, spit it out. I ain't no spring chicken, an' I'd go through hell to find the girl." The men were uneasy. Here was a man who knew more in a minute than they had supposed he would know when they were through with him. What should they do? If he would consent to be robbed in order to protect them, well, it would give them a better opportunity to handle the case.

"Well?" Henry uttered the one word and waited.

"Damn me, Mr. Weaver, you've got the best nerve I ever run up against!"

Johnson extended his hand, but Brown seemed so stunned he did not even look up.

"Out with it gents; let's get down to business. Time's going, and I'm considerable impatient to see the game moving;" he motioned Brown to a seat.

"Mr. Weaver, I don't mind telling you we were sent here to get you into a sort of panel game, but, when we found you were on the square and would put up the coin if given a fair show, well, we decided, Brown and I, to throw the other side and stand by you. But, if you would go with us tonight and let them separate you from about three hundred dollars, it would put us on easy street in this game. We could pass the word that you were out of funds, but would try and get some more and that would end all attempts to bilk you for a time and leave us in the field, then we could get right down to work on the case."

"That's all that's necessary," their employer informed them. "I've got something like six hundred dollars here. You each get one hundred to use as you see fit. I'll salt one hundred dollars if you'll excuse me a minute, and I'll go up against this little game as has been fixed for me."

Brown whistled. "I'll be literally clawed into cat meat, if this isn't a plant?" He burst out when Weaver had gone to his room. "What do you think of him anyway, Bob? Had us twigged to a fare-you-well from the word go, and up and buys, and sits in to play both ends

against the middle. Well, I'll be damned!" He jumped up. "I never in my short existence, heard of such a thing."

"And you'll live another long time before you get next to another like him. Why, Billie, he's simply it. Talk about rigging him—Peter at the gate's a slouch beside that old rounder." Brown reached over and tapped his partner on the shoulder. "I feel that wad, something like two thousand in good bills, resting against my heart. Why, it's easy."

"Ought to be when Weaver is willing to play both sides," Johnson replied as Weaver left the elevator and came toward them.

"All right, gents; let's be going. I don't want to pass too much money to you here or they might ask you some mighty embarrassin' questions tomorrow." At which speech, a very comprehensive look passed between the detectives as the trio went out into the night.

If Desk Sergeant Mike had known that Estella Davis was one of Fagan's victims, he would hardly have settled upon one of her joints as the place in which Henry Weaver was to be relieved of his money, and could Fagan have safely refused the honor thus thrust upon her, Weaver's two allies would not have found a warm trail so soon. Fagan had remonstrated, but the persuasive powers of Jenks overcame her scruples and things were put in readiness for the reception of the victim.

It was almost 10 o'clock when Tom bounded into Fagan's room.

"They landed the guy and he's down in the saloon now. Where's it to be pulled off?" he inquired breathlessly.

"Over at Mary's place; she's half moved out now, and by the time the police get next, the place will be empty."

"Who's over there?" Tom asked.

"'Red' Kate and Cora. I'll go right over; you keep them for a few minutes."

Fagan went out the back way and Tom returned to the bar. Thirty minutes later, Weaver and the detectives were in Mary's flat on a neighboring street. Fagan wore a veil, and to more effectually hide her identity, sat in a dark corner. Johnson opened the interview by in-

troducing Mr. Weaver, then he and Brown left the room.

"Who is this girl you want to see?" Fagan asked.

"Estella Davis," Weaver replied, his voice shaking with emotion.

"And if I were to tell you she is in this house, within a few feet of you, what would you say?"

"I'd thank God, Madam, and bless you, if you'd just let me see her for ten minutes.

"You want to take her with you, don't you?"

"Certainly, I want to take her," he answered.

"Well;" Fagan's voice was level and firm. "Estella Davis is here, but before you can see her or take her with you, there's a little matter of board and other expenses to be settled for."

"How much?"

"Five hundred dollars."

But woman, I haven't got five hundred dollars, and I don't know as I could get that much." Henry was chuckling inwardly; the first test he had put his men to had not failed. Five hundred dollars was the price set on his head, they had scaled the price to three hundred and would lie like pirates in substantiation.

"How much have you?"

"Well, I've got——" he took out his bill book and counted out the money; "two hundred and eighty dollars here and they's," he fumbled in his vest pockets, "twenty-five dollars here, but I got to have five dollars for the hotel anyway." He looked intently at Fagan.

"Three hundred dollars," Fagan could not hide her greed. "That's less than I ought to take, but if it's all you have—" She held out her hand.

Henry walked over to her, holding the three hundred dollars between his fingers.

"If I give you this money, what assurance have I that I get what I'm paying for?" shaking the bills.

"Every assurance," she answered, still reaching for the money. "Didn't you come here with two detectives. What chance have I to play any game on you?"

"By crackey; I forgot them detectives." He shoved money, fist and all into a pocket. "What's to hinder me from a-demandin' that the girl be produced and a-orderin' them detectives to take her out of here?"

Fagan scowled. "Lots to hinder," she assured him.

"They have no warrants for my arrest nor for this girl and long before they can get one, I'll have her safe enough, even from your detectives."

"I'm going to call them in;" he started for the door.

"Stop right there, Mr. Weaver, you either settle with me here and now——" She tapped the bell and "Red" Kate appeared. "Send Tom and Walter here, and if I tap this bell again, take Estella Davis to the place I told you of." The woman stood irresolute and seemed on the point of saying something on her own account, when Fagan started toward her, saying, "Get out of here and do as I tell you!" Red Kate disappeared.

"Now what do you intend to do?" Fagan demanded. "You either fork over, or you don't see the girl. And I warn you, that if you attempt to leave this room, I'll send your Estella where you won't see her in a while." Tom and Walter, two as unprepossessing bouncers as one would meet in a good while, entered the room and stood on either side the door grinning at the gray-haired victim. "What do you say Mr. Weaver?"" Fagan stood with outstretched hand, her fingers twitching to feel the money.

"As it seems to be up to me, I guess about all I need to say can be said by this here money." He pulled out the handful of bills and placed them on Fagan's outstretched palm, while the bouncers' grins almost gave forth sound. Fagan took the money to the flaring gas, counted it, and turned to the men: "There's even three hundred here. Is that right, Mr. Weaver?"

"That's all I got," Weaver answered.

"All right, sit down and I'll get the girl."

Fagan left the room and was followed by the grinning bouncers. A key turned in the lock; Weaver jumped up with an odd oath, and bounded to the door; it was locked. He raved, kicked and stormed while the actors in the late drama scuttled from the place like rats from a burning crib. For a time, Weaver had forgotten his part. The thought had come to him that Estella might have been hidden there, and so wrapped was he in his purpose, that he had forgotten that all of this had been planned, that he was but aiding two of the semi-criminals of the city to play safe. When it all came back to him, he sat under the flaring gas and buried his face

in his hands. After a time, the key grated and Weaver pulled a revolver from his boot leg and stood waiting. The door opened and Johnson thrust his head in.

"Coast clear?" he whispered. Weaver pocketed the revolver and nodded. "I hated to leave you so long, Mr. Weaver, but we got onto a warm trail here and I had to help Brown get started."

"Was she here?"

"No, not here, but that woman had her, and we know who got her away from Fagan, and Brown's gone on that pipe." Johnson was almost breathless.

"Now, partner, let's get out of here. But first we must bust the door from this side, so you could get at the key from the outside. Then, I'll make off and you get down on the street and raise the dead. Yell for the police and keep it up until some one comes. Then tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock you come to that address;" he handed Weaver a card, but it didn't bear the name of a detective agency, "and be sure no one is on your trail. You see, we don't dare to show up at the hotel again and no one is to know that you have anything to do with us."

"And you think you will get the girl?" Weaver asked.

"Sure of it, and she'll be right as a rivet when we find her. Mark what I tell you. Weaver, you are going to have the pleasure of handing over that three thousand." Johnson laughed.

"All right, you'll find me happier to hand it over than I was to give that she-devil the three hundred, I can tell you that."

"Say, that was a plant, and you certainly did the innocent act to the queen's taste."

The door was broken and Johnson had been gone for fully five minutes when Henry made his way to a hall window overlooking the street and lifted his voice to shout, "Thieves! Thieves! I've been robbed! I've been robbed!"

Midnight traffic halted, pedestrians gathered in knots upon the pavement and in the street. The police were called and soon Henry Weaver was explaining to police and citizens just what sort of a game had been worked on him. The door bore evidence; the deserted

flat, more eloquent testimony. At the police station, he told his story and took his way to the hotel.

Fagan lost no time, but sent a trusted messenger to Madame Vaughn's. The doorkeeper protested that Madame had long since retired; the messenger insisted that there was no time to waste; Madame had to have the message that night.

"Get Estella Davis out of your house; the police have made a mess of things, and have got me where there's a chance that this girl's relatives will be down on me. Will explain later." This was the message Madame read. She sent for the doorkeeper and asked him if Mr. Johnson was in the house. He was. Well, he must be called at once. Tell him Madame must see him immediately. Estella was awakened by the ringing of the bell.

"Wake up, there's a fire or something;" she reached over and kissed him.

"What in blazes is that infernal bell?"

"Oh, don't, James. Shall I get up and find out what's wanted?"

"No, you keep still. Maybe they've pulled the house." He was out of bed and had partially dressed. "Confound that bell; do they think we are dead?"

"Pulled the house," Estella repeated to herself. "Now I wonder what that means? Can it be fire?" She too got up.

At the door, Joel was in earnest conversation with some one. He looked around and saw Estella coming toward him.

"Go back to bed, Stell, the house isn't afire; but Madame wants to see me; must be something the matter at home." And he was gone.

"Do you want to keep that plaything of yours?" was Madame's first question.

"Want to keep her? Of course, I do. If I didn't, do you suppose I'd have let you milk me all this time?"

"Well, if you want her, it's up to you to get her away from here before daylight. It's after 12 now, and her folks are in town and Fagan's afraid, so if you want her, you must pay up and get her out."

"But great snakes, Vaughn, I can't get her out before daylight. Hell's fire, I've been rigging her with

the yarn that you wouldn't let her out of your sight for a month."

"Tell her I have a tip that the police are going to make a raid on the house early in the morning, and out of regard for her, I want you to take her to some safe place."

"That's the cheese, Vaughn, great head, eh? Say, you can trust me for whatever balance is due, can't you?" Madame nodded. "I'll need all I've got with me, to see this thing through."

In Estella's room, Joel explained about the forthcoming raid, and how he could never risk having her, his precious darling, found in such a place, and even Madame felt the same. Estella was soon ready for flight and in her hurry and excitement, forgot even her friend, the only one she had found at Madame's, and at 1 o'clock she was being whirled down town and to one of the great depots, thence on an early train to a small city in a neighboring state. Arrived at which place, James Y. Johnson and wife registered and went to their room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MICKEY'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

Down through the long, soot-blackened shops an army of workers dropped their tools and scudded away to seek their dinner pails, the measure of America's prosperity 'tis said, before the noon whistle had ceased its clamor.

Out on the shady side of the casting shop Mickey and Charley found a snug corner and sat down together.

"Well, Mickey," Charley bantered, "have you got that religion we were talking about the other day?"

"Nixie, not fer mine." The cripple looked up scowling, his complement of teeth fastened in a tough hunk of beef. As he pulled, the scowl spread. "You see, Country," he explained, when he had finally swallowed the severed chunk at a gulp, "dem four-flushers out at de meetin' says as how a man kin be good all de time, commencin' 'fore breakfas' an' never lettin' up on de graft till he's sound asleep, an' it stan's t' reason dey's liars."

"Tut, tut, Mickey! You don't know what you are talking about," the other objected, "my mother's a Christian, and a good one."

"Did de old lady pass any ov de dope along t' youse?" the boy inquired, scrutinizing his companion gravely.

Charley smiled, and was about to reply, when Mickey broke in with:

"Chuck it, Country. Youse maybe knows a heap more 'bout some things dan I does, but youse don't know how't tip off nothin' in de mertropolis, an' dat's flat. Dem gospel mills out in de country where dey ain't no great sight ov nothin' layin' 'round loose, an' no bulls t' made de game excitin', an' no mollies t' help a feller blow de cush, may be on de level—dat ain't

de city, an' de city's differenter, an' don't never let dat git outen yer nut—see?"

"But I don't see how it is different, and besides——"

"Now youse's tellin' it! Youse don't see, an' it's all in usin' dese peepers. Ain't I bin born here? An' ain't I bin up against all de games on de street? Well, den. Say—I jist took t' dem gospel meetin's out t' de mission, as youse so kindly asks me t' attend t', fer a whole week straight. Missed seein' a bang-up ballet an' a hooker ov a Jessy James show, an' passed up de Wild West layout, all t' accommodate me frien' from de country—an' say, I'm a givin' it t' youse straight when I says I'm damned sorry I didn't go t' th' shows an' let dem sky pilots alone. Are youse wise?"

A very lame "No" was all the surprised champion of regeneration could muster. That little "no" served to open the vials of Mickey's long suppressed wrath.

"No, course youse don't. What did them high-collared, baby fingered fellers an' der sister mollies tell me th' first night I goes out t' th' mission?" He paused to gather up the thread of his story.

"Why, dey says cast yer bread on th' waters an' she'll come back t' youse—give yer dollars t' th Lord—an' dem gents was a leggin' direct fer him fer they took th' coin—an' youse is sure t' git it back ten fold. When I hears that I says, 'I'm in on this here game ef I've got it doped out right;' so I jist nudges a plump old pussy as set by me, an' asks what dat gittin' back ten fold as dey was workin' off means. She says th' Lord pays back ten fer one. That tip suited me t' a T, an' I plumps a dollar in, an' when de dealer sees what I dropped in th' basket, he up an inquires how much change I wants—youse kin take it frum me, I give him th' glassy eye. 'I hain't no piker,' I tells him, an' he lays his nice baby hand on me nut, an' kind ov slobbers out, 'God bless youse, God bless youse.' Now I calkalate youse hain't a goin' t' b'leve me when I tells youse dat whole darned gospel game is a skin, an' they've got th' bull on de beat fixed, all right, all right. I ain't goin' t' git back nary red cent I put inter de game. an' I dropped three bucks, an' waited till th' last night fer th' drawin' t' come off.

"Last night that same feller comes around lookin'

fer more of th' mazuma—a givin' us his little spiel 'bout castin' bread on th' water, an' a lendin' money t' th' Lord. I'd gone de limit, so I up an' asks dem when th' drawin's t' come off—an' what d' youse 'spose they has th' nerve t' tell me? Me, as thought I'd bin up against all de games in de city." Mickey stood before his audience of one deeply interested and somewhat puzzled listener with clinched fists and blazing eyes.

"Well," Charley hesitated, "I hardly know what they could have told you."

"Course youse don't, but I'll tell yer, on th' level, Country, ef youse don't know no more about other games dan youse does 'bout dis gospel business in de mertropolis, I'd advise youse not t' recommend none ov 'em t' any more ov yer city friends, dat's all."

"I won't, Mickey, I won't," Charley promised, and then asked, "What did they tell you?"

"Tell me? Why dey had de nerve t' tell me—me, Mickey Dougherty, dat I'd git me ten t' one when I got t' heaven. Now what 'd youse think ov dat fer pure gall? I wanted t' have de whole bunch pulled, but de bull's bin fixed all right, all right; fer he says t' me when I tells him as I've bin flim-flammed by some sky pilots as was runnin' a skin game, 'Go chase yerself, me little rooster, 'r I'll run youse in.'" At the close of his speech Mickey sat down and attacked his dinner with renewed vigor, while Charley sat thinking.

Charley Harris liked the cripple because of his straightforwardness, his avowed friendship, and the many little big-hearted things he was capable of putting through for his friends. If the whole truth must be told he liked him as well for his sturdy defense of his philosophy of life, even if it did hold to the ugly, twisted ethics of the semi-criminal world in which the boy had been chained since birth. On one point his mind was made up quickly. Turning to Mickey he said:

"Mickey, since I recommended the game—guaranteed it, you might say—I feel in duty bound to see that none of my friends lose money." He reached into a pocket and drew out a handful of silver. "Let's see; you put up three dollars," he had to smile at the look of perplexity on Mickey's face, "and while I can't make

good that gospel outfit's promise of ten to one, I am willing to put up five dollars to——"

"No youse don't," the cripple interposed, "I ain't no welsher, Country. I took de tip an' played it on me own dope, an' I don't want——"

"Here, you young limb of Satan, take the money, it belongs to you." Charley reached over as he spoke and dumped the silver into Mickey's dinner pail. "Just to hear your experience in your first attempt to get religion is worth that much to me," he added, and as Mickey still showed signs of rebellion, he went on, "Mickey, old man, I want you for a friend; between friends a money debt should never stand for a moment longer than is absolutely necessary—and I owed you that five-spot as much as though I had borrowed it from you."

A grimy, greasy hand was held out, and as Charley grasped it Mickey whispered hoarsely, "Country, youse is white, an' I'm goin' t' call youse Charley like th' rest ov th' gang does."

Charley laughed, and Mickey made good in his next speech.

"On de level, Co—Charley, I didn't give up de gospel jist becos dem guys was a runnin' a con game on de money end ov de biz. Youse see, it's dis way: I knows dey's lots ov hold-outs in all de games, an' dey's some dat's square, an' ef de rest ov de gospel game had 'a bin on de level—why shucks! I'd a hunted up a square game an' played me coin, but de whole works is rotten."

"How's that?" Charley asked.

"Why dis way: De main guy says all anybody frum a molly t' a porchclimber has got ter do is t' say, 'I've foun' Jesus,' 'r some sich magic biz as dat, an' to oncet all de sins dey ever did is washed away. Now youse kin take it frum me dat I carried dat aroun' in me nut till de load hurt frightful. Yes, sir, I carried dat fer three days an' nights 'fore I chucked it. Why, tain't reasonable t' 'spose dey's anybody as is runnin' sich a bargain counter up to heaven,—an' it ain't no square deal no how. Fer why, here's me—an' I ain't had nobody t' put me wise t' dis bargain counter biz till youse comes an' butts in—an' ef de thing's on de level, an'

they ain't no other way ov my gettin' inter heaven 'cept I goes through de gospel mill—why, ef I'd a croaked last month, 'r when I was hurt dat time, wouldn't I a gone plump t' hell? An' ef I'd gone t' that bargain sale an' got religion an' hollered 'I've got it! I've got it-' like I hears them a whoopin' it up out dere, an' didn't have t' make good t' all de folks what I swiped things frum, an' lied to, an' so forth, seems t' me de thing wouldn't wash. Jist seems that there way t' me. Seems t' me God 'ud say, 'Youse is a purty cheap skate, son,' seems that there way t' me. But one ov dem singin' fellers made it plain dat all a guy has ter do t' git right in a front row in their heaven is t' fess up. Jist fess up, an' God 'ud let de meanest cuss in 'Chi' crowd right up t' de desk an' begin singin'."

"In the name of all the saints, what sort of a crowd did you get into?" Charley demanded, and inwardly resolved to go out and see for himself.

"They was mostly batty, Cou—Charley, an' three of dem old bats jist did deir turn de night I puts in me second buck—why, one ov dem had killed his wife by inches. He says so hisself, an' dey ain't nobody a givin' him th' third degree, neither,—it was most as good as a play. The next cuss as comes out had blast-feemed, whatever dat is, an' had robbed a sick pard ov hisn ov thousands ov dollars in a minin' deal, an' dem galoots never did have t' make good t' nobody but God. Nixie fer deirs! All any ov dem had t' do was t' say, 'Jesus, I b'leve,' 'r some sich rot as dat, an' all deir cussed doin's was washed away in de twinklin' ov a eye—an' God's eye at dat.

"When dey gits all through a spoutin' an' dem sisters has quit amenin' an' shakin' dem bats' mitts, an' things gits still I up an' asks de one as robbed his pard ef th' pard was alive. He gits up an' says, a-turnin' to them sisters: 'Dear sisters an' brothers, he's alive t' th' flesh but dead t' God. He's still in sin, an' hasn't found th' blood of Christ a balm t' his soul,' 'r some sich flummydiddle as dat.

"Then I asks, fer I was interested, an' besides I had money in de game—I says: 'Mister, when youse got religion in your soul did youse pay dat pard th' money youse stole frum him?' Youse ought t' have

seen dem old mollies turn up deir noses at me. An' he says, 'No, me young frien', I didn't need t' do dat, fer God fergived de debt.' 'Say,' I asks him, 'did God really an' truly pass him th' coin?' "

"Say, Mickey, what are you giving me? You didn't butt in on those gospel people like that, did you?" Charley asked, smiling.

"Sure t'ing I did. Ain't I got me money on de game? An', you'd never b'leve it less'n I told youse, dat geezer as robbed his pard tries t' make out he don't know nothin' 'bout what I'm a-tryin' to pass t' him till a old mollie puts it t' him straight, an' den he says to me, 'No, me brother, God does not handle th' filthy lucre, an' so far as me poor sin-cussed pard 's consarned, I'm 'fraid his portion in th' life beyond th' grave'll be in th' lake ov fire,' an' th' dirty welsher begins t' leak somethin' dreadful.

"I up an' asks quick as a wink, 'Say, Mister Whatsyername, don't youse think now dat youse is bin put wise t' de gospel game, ef youse was ter take th' money youse smouched frum yer pard, an' jist handed it t' him, an' den told him 'bout this here new deal, dat he'd take de tip?' "

"He was plum beat out, Charley, an' I'd a had de count on him in no time but some ov dem old hen sisters who's gone soft on his nibs begins t' sing 'Jesus, He Paid it All,' an' th' guy gits his wind an' stands there a-pattin' his hands an' a-smilin' t' dem mollies as fixed it fer him. But I just stood dere a-waitin' fer th' next round, even ef dey did try t' call me down.

"When dem old hens quits a-cacklin' long 'nuff t' give him a chanst he hes his story all fixed, an' turns t' me an says, 'Th' song tells th' whole story, me young frien'—Jesus paid it all—all t' him I owes—sin had left a grimy stain but she's washed witer'n snow,' an' a lot ov slush like dat.

"When I goes fer him hard an' wants t' know things, he says it don't make no kind ov diff'rence what a bloke has done—murder, steal, lie,—any ole thing goes. He don't have t' square hisself with nobody fer nothin'. An' jist as soon as he's got deir kind ov religion he's good fer a scalper's ticket straight t' heaven. Den ef th' poor cuss he stole frum an' lied to 'r did

anything like a thousan' other devlish, low-down, mean things to, still stays mad an' wants a square deal, wants this here religious bloke t' do th' square thing by him on this here earth—why, it's th' feller as wants de square deal as goes plump t' hell, an' th' welsher goes t' heaven. An' th' times dey has up dere! Nuttin' t' do but prance 'round in circus close, an' eat an sing, an' drink milk outen a river dat flows right by de captain's desk—say, deys got a warm pipe, all right, all right." Mickey got up, carefully, placed a battered lid on an equally battered dinner pail and looked off into the blue as he added:

"Dem gosple folks takes dope, an' I wouldn't be s'prised ef dey was pulled fer hittin' th' pipe one ov dese here days—dey's nuttin' to it. Youse may hev nuther kind ov religion in de country, but it stan's t' reason dat dey hain't no God whose goin' t' send the feller as has bin robbed an' had other things done t' him t' hell, an' give th' robber, an' murderer a nice easy graft in heaven, jist 'cause he blubbers a few minutes an' saddles all his cussedness off onto Jesus Christ —why, I ain't God, an' I'll be damned ef Mickey Dougherty 'ud put up with sich a gummy mess ov welshers an' four-flushers as dem people is. Bet yer life, I wouldn't! Ef I was God I'd say, 'Here, youse reprobates, 'fore youse gits t' prancin' 'round a-tellin' what all I'm a-goin' t' do for youse, youse git out an' square up with dem as youse robbed an' murdered an' things.' Bet yer life I'd make 'em hit de grit, an' as they went down th' line I'd give 'em me toe an' tell 'em I wasn't runnin' no bargain counters fer blokes ov deir kidney; dem is things Mickey Dougherty'd do ef he was God."

Then the whistle blew.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WORKER'S DEATH.

The throb and hum of systematized industry in the long casting room at Holdon's was at full tide when something went wrong with the head-block on one of the great side cranes. A mass of molten metal in "No. 1" was ready to be drawn, and the cable was found to be caught in the block, thus preventing the swinging of the big ladle to receive its charge. The foreman, almost beside himself, in an emergency that threatened both danger to the men and the loss of the charge as well, ordered the electric traveling crane brought down from the other end of the long building. At the same time he ordered the mast of the side crane thrown over close to the girder that carried the traveling crane, in order that a workman might get at the head-block after being carried up on the electric crane.

As the crane came down the shop on its two broad tracks, Price happened to look in, and seeing all the men at "No. 1," together with some of the other employes in that end of the shop standing idle, he rushed in and demanded of the foreman at "No. 1" what he was doing. The oath that accompanied the superintendent's question caused an ugly look to settle over Williams' face, and he did not lift his eyes as he gave the information asked for.

"Here," Price shouted, beckoning one of the men. "You, Johnson. Come, be lively. Get hold of that chain and when he pulls you up high enough crawl through the cage and out over the track, and see what's the matter with the cursed thing. Hurry!"

Johnson had no sooner caught the chain and gotten his foot in the loop he had formed for it, than Price gave the signal to hoist, and the worker was on his way to the girder above.

Clambering up through the cage he made his way

over the trucks of the crane, and perched upon the track was soon at work getting the cable back into its groove. He was probably two minutes at the job when Price, fuming at the delay this mishap was causing, bellowed an ill-sounding name at him and advised him to hurry. The superintendent's lips had hardly formed the last brutal word, when Johnson signaled Williams that the job was finished, and the next instant was crawling over the trucks of the great crane.

The operator in his cage under the crane could not see the man above as he swung himself past the forward wheels of the truck, so when Price gave him a signal to move the crane back he threw on the current. Instantly there came to the ears of the workers a scream of agony, and as they looked up Johnson was seen struggling between the trucks. The operator threw off the current and stood with blanched cheeks and trembling body looking at Price for orders.

When caught between the trucks Johnson had fallen face down. His legs lay across the track; his body supported by his hold upon a brace rod he had caught as he fell. When the men below looked up at his first cry they were quick to see his perilous position and called out to him to hold on.

"My God, my God!" he kept crying, while his blood streamed down from the girder and formed a little puddle on the hard packed clay floor. The men looking up into his staring eyes, shuddered as they saw him shaken with pain—saw his struggles to release his right leg from the crushing weight of the truck. Charley Harris and Mickey had quitted their work and rushed down to the furnace at the first agonized cry.

Coming up behind the superintendent, Charley touched him on the arm and asked: "Why isn't some one sent up to help him?"

Price turned, scowling, and throwing up his hand demanded to know who in hell was running the plant. The operator understood his motion to mean that he was to go ahead, and with shaking nerves turned on the current.

The crunching of bone under tons of steel, and the cry of a human soul in torment answered Price's question as Johnson's body came plunging down head first,

" * * * d'youse hear me! Youse killed him, an' dese here men knows it."
—Page 213.

a clear fall of twenty feet. In unison with the impact of the worker's body on the hard floor a groan went up from the throats of a hundred men.

A moment of silence, save for the footfalls of running men, fell upon those within sight of the tragedy. The maimed form lying at Charley's feet did not move. He fell upon his knees as one of the men brought the legs, which had fallen a little distance from the body, and pulled Johnson's head around until he could see his face, while Mickey, crouched by the body of the man who had been his friend, looked squarely into the eyes of the man he believed was responsible for the death of the worker.

"Well?" Price uttered this one word, a question.

Charley, looking up, answered: "Dead," and began straightening the body out, but paused as he heard Price shouting at the men who had crowded up from all parts of the shop:

"What do you men think this is, a holiday? Get back to your work, all of you. Get back, I say!"

"I can git back quick enough without you putting your hands on me," a burly moulder protested as Price pushed him back. The men were moving back slowly when Price turned to Charley:

"Get up from there and go back to your job," he ordered, curtly.

"But some one ought to stay with him—the coroner," Charley insisted, and was interrupted by the superintendent.

"Coroner be blowed." Noting that Charley seemed unconvinced, he proceeded to enlarge upon the theme.

"No sniveling coroner's jury gets to sit on this case. And, my man, my advice to you is to forget it; do you understand?"

"No, we don't want no coroner's jury on dis here case," Mickey's shrill voice piped up. "Not when Mickey Dougherty'd swear de 'supe' killed him. No, we don't want no——"

"What's that, you young devil?" Price panted, as he made an effort to put hands on the cripple.

Safe at the feet of the dead man Mickey replied: "Jist what I sed, d'youse hear me! Youse killed him, an' dese here men knows it." The cripple had taken

his eyes off the superintendent for an instant as he waved a hand toward the men. In that instant Price had cleared the body at a single bound, and before any one of the men could interfere, had knocked the boy down and was kicking him viciously, when Charley, with an oath, his first in many months, pulled Price away from the boy. By this time the workers were crowding back to the scene of the morning's tragedy, and among them came the big moulder who had objected to being pushed back but a few minutes before. When he saw the boy lying motionless on the floor, he pushed his way through the crowd until he stood in front of the superintendent. There was murder in his eyes; a twitching of the muscles that held his jaws set; his great hands drawn into knots; the swelling muscles of his arms showing in ridges under the skin, and a hunger in him for the blood of the man a wise providence had given him as a task master. Price caught that look and did not resist when Charley pushed him out through the crowd and toward a side door.

In the meantime some of the men had taken Mickey out, and as Charley and Price came through the doorway the first thing they saw was the little group of men about the cripple. Price had gotten his nerve back by this time, so, shaking off the hold Charley had kept upon him, he went over to the group. Pushing one of the men aside he bent over the boy.

Quick as a flash Mickey's two hands went up; one caught Price by the hair, while the nails of the other were drawn down over the superintendent's face, tearing the skin and bringing blood in streams. With a bellow of rage and pain Price straightened up, bringing the boy with him.

A dozen men, Charley amongst them, interfered, and Mickey, his hold broken, went limp as a rag and was tenderly laid upon the ground. Three of the men had Price by the arms, holding him back from the boy, when Carson, the big moulder, pushed his way into the fray once more, and, pointing toward the office, said to Price:

"You better move along, mister man—you can fire me to-morrow, but if you ain't out of my sight in two

minutes, I'll give you what you gave Johnson, damn you."

The men dropped their hold upon the superintendent's arms, stepped back and waited for the fight. Price took one swift look at the moulder, and turning on his heel started for the office.

"I'll make it hot for you—all of you," was his parting shot, as he moved off, sopping up the blood from his face in a handkerchief.

Moran, the foreman under whom both Charley and Mickey worked, had seen the whole of the trouble. As Price left he came out of the shop and after examining Mickey, turned to the men.

"Go back to your work, men," he called out, and added, "none of you need be afraid of trouble from the office if you let things drop where they are."

As the men went back to their tasks, one red-headed fellow laughed. "Bet yer life they won't stir a bad mess. Old Holdon couldn't find another such stinker as Price if he hunted hell over with a fine-toothed comb."

"Yes, and Price couldn't stay a day if they let this killing be looked into," another observed.

One of the men who worked on Mickey's shift picked up his shovel, jammed it into a sand pile, spit on his hands, and, as he lifted the shovel of sand, chuckled: "God, but Mickey's got th' nerve. Didn't he play that just right?"

"Yes," said Carson, "and if that low-lived hound so much as puts a finger on him again I'll smash him if it's the last day's work I do in th' world."

The man at the shovel looked up, nodded approval, and went on filling his flask.

Outside Moran was saying to Charley Harris: "I guess you had better stay with him until he's able to navigate—He's a game little cuss—always was willing to fight anything in the shops—but I never thought he'd be game enough t' put his mark on Price, though they's been bad blood between them for a long time."

When Moran had gone into the shop Charley went back to the cripple and asked him how he was coming.

"I'se all stoved in, Charley; but I guess they hain't nothing serious dat's broke. Darn his dirty picter! I

hain't even yet." He rolled over on his side. "It hurts where he kicked me in th' slats, when I was down," he observed, screwing his face up to take the edge off the pain.

As Charley sat on the grass beside him wondering what was to happen next, the thought came to him that he had been in a sort of maze from the very beginning of the trouble, all of it seemed wrong, not one of the men had acted as he had been taught men should act in such an emergency. The brutality of Price—Mickey's grit—Carson's bull-dog jaws—the sheeplike docility of the men—his own shortcomings—the white-faced operator—the death cry of the tortured man—the dripping blood—the inhumanity of it all—it was all sickeningly, disgustingly, wholly unbelievable to one who had not experienced it. And a nightmare of uncertainties to one who had witnessed it. Johnson's death had resulted, as he believed, from Price's or the crane operator's blunder—or both. He also felt that Mickey's charge that Price had killed Johnson, while it was a bit hasty, still had something of reason behind it, and that thought coupled with a remembrance of the superintendent's callousness, and his evident reluctance to have anything like an investigation into the tragedy of the morning, all served to puzzle him. Neither could he understand the men. Johnson's companions, the men upon his job, not one of them but had gone back to his work without a backward look when Price had ordered them to go, adding oaths to his insulting speech—what sort of men were they? Only one man's part in the whole affair appealed to him—that man was Carson, the big moulder. As he thought how Carson's great hands twitched, how white his lips were, and how hard and steady his eyes gleamed and glinted as he pushed his way up to the superintendent, he sighed—yes, if he had it to over again he would let Carson half kill the brute.

Looking down at Mickey, whose old man's face was twisted into an ugly scowl, Charley told himself there was but little comfort to the peacemaker who interfered in a man's fight, and especially when he didn't know the first rule of the game.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOLDON GIVES ADVICE.

Wherever one goes in our industro-social life he comes face to face with the one great fact developed by our nineteenth and twentieth century grabble for dollars—the fact that the more one struggles for control of things material the less confidence he will have in the honor and integrity of his fellow men. To become rich is to lose respect for the old-time sense of honor that once held men to plighted word, even to death. To-day the citizen who measures his wealth by six figures or more hires detectives to watch over his precious life.

Find two employers who trust each other to-day; then leave them to the exigencies of the struggle; go back in ten years and find but one employer; this is the history of our industrial growth. The employer who has disappeared has been over-reached. The man who has the business is the one who refused to be ruled by word of honor.

A perfected spy system is growing up to meet the demand for men to watch these other men whom we distrust. A jealous spouse hires a private detective. A captain of industry hires a whole detective agency. An employer of labor calls for assistance from a union spy furnisher, and gets a number of men who commit perjury in order that the employer may know what his workmen do in their secret (?) meetings. A railway employs spotters to protect its dividends from the inroads of conductors and other worthy employes who believe it no crime to "swipe" things and money from a railway. In every shop, factory, mill, or other industrial gathering together of labor we find the cheap lickspittle, who carries tales from the job to the boss, and by so doing gains a short-lived opportunity to bask in the purchased smiles of the employer.

Johnson's body had hardly ceased quivering when the news had reached Holdon as he sat in his office intent upon the morning paper. Holdon did not care to make a personal investigation, but he did not think it good policy to have the body left in sight of the men for too long a time. After waiting some time for Price to report, he took up the telephone, and calling up the yard boss, instructed him to take three men and remove the body to a tool house at the back of the plant.

The laborers were carrying their burden away when Carson ordered Price to move on. When the superintendent complied with that none too gentle request he had no intention of allowing the office force to see him until he had been patched up a bit. He sneaked into his office by the back way and busied himself with water and court-plaster. For every look in the mirror his anger grew. When he had in a measure covered the worst of the smarting scratches he called up Moran and ordered him to discharge Carson, Harris, and even the cripple. As he took the receiver from his ear Moran was asking him to wait a minute. The minute was long, and at the end of it came this laconic message from the foreman:

"I won't fire the men until I hear from you again—you may change your mind after you've seen the old man—he's been asking for you—says keep everything quiet."

Price was furious, thinking Moran had reported to Holdon. He was about to insist that the men be discharged forthwith, when a clerk began pounding upon his door.

"What's wanted now?" he demanded.

"Mr. Holdon wants to see you."

"Tell him I've got to go downtown at once. I can't——"

"But he said AT ONCE," the clerk shouted from the other side of the locked door. Even Price knew that Holdon's "AT ONCE" would never be discounted by a hired man but once, even though he held the office of superintendent. He hung up the receiver, satisfied the clerk that he would attend, took another look at his patched face, swore he would have satisfaction out

of the three hands at fault, and started for the president's office.

Between his office and that of the president all of the office force that could do so took a good look at the superintendent, offering another illustration of the spy system. Practically every man and woman in the office had been informed that some one out in the "works" had whipped the superintendent. Some had him half killed, others told how a number of the men had pounded him, and all had the story in one form or another. Yes, they knew a man had been killed, but that was a much more common occurrence than the pummeling of a superintendent, consequently the story of the killing did not produce even a ripple, while the lesser tragedy filled the office with excitement.

"Well, you've been in an accident, have you?" was Holdon's greeting as Price entered the office. As he asked the question Holdon turned to Moses and intimated that his presence could be dispensed with.

"Yes, something of an accident," Price answered as he took a chair, "but I fancy the three men I ordered Moran to fire will not be so ready for accidents in the future."

"Whom did you discharge?"

"Why, the three who caused all the trouble—Harris, Carson, and that little devil of a cripple." Price had gotten to his feet and was gesticulating with some show of temper, when Holdon said:

"Sit down, sit down, Price, you are either too angry or too excited over this matter." After a moment of silence he went on: "They tell me Mickey gave you those scratches."

"Yes, and by —— I'll half kill him when I catch him outside. I don't care if he is a cripple," Price stormed out.

Holdon had reached for the phone. As he took down the receiver he remarked: "I don't think you are in just the right mood to deal with men, besides, Johnson's death is the fourth within two weeks, and if those men are discharged to-day, especially after your little set-to with them, there'll be hell to pay as soon as they can get to the right folks with their story.

He turned to the phone. "Give me Moran, please,"

he called, and looking squarely at Price asked: "Did the three men you ordered Moran to discharge see Johnson killed?"

Price nodded assent.

"That being the case, don't you think you had best tell Moran you were a little hasty, and for him not to say anything to the men?" It was put in form of a question, but Price understood it as a command. Flushing to the roots of his hair, he reached over, and taking the instrument off Holdon's desk, stammered out the will of the master touching the men when Moran answered the call.

He had taken his seat again in none too good humor, when Holdon surprised him by saying:

"Price, I gave you credit for a lot more sense than you have shown in handling this affair." Price attempted to justify his conduct, but Holdon waved it aside. "Nonsense, man, I tell you you lost your head, and I am more put out by it than you can think, for I intended to leave the business in your hands entirely." Price looked up, then down, biting his lips in vexation. "Yes," Holdon went on, "I had expected to go to Europe within two months, but——"

"It will all blow over sooner than that," Price ventured.

"Yes, this incident will, but how about the next one?"

"The next one won't happen," the superintendent announced confidently. "You see, I had the Johnson accident on my nerves, and with the interference of that young Harris, and the cripple's blurting out that I'd murdered Johnson—well, I did lose my head—but you must remember I wasn't at the head of the plant—you want to consider that, Mr. Holdon." Holdon nodded and Price continued his explanation. "It was enough to rattle any one, and the three who brought on the after trouble can be gotten rid of one at a time as soon as you think it safe, then we won't need to fear another such exhibition."

"Mickey stays," Holdon interrupted at this point, "and as for Harris, I want you to get to be the best friend he has in the world." At Price's look of astonishment the magnate chuckled. "Yes, sir, his best

friend. Why, man, he's got a machine—an automotic moulder—and it's worth a million. I want you to get next to it, and trust me for the rest. Yes, sir, you want to see him to-day before he gets time to think things over and get set against you. Tell him you are sorry—sorry over the whole business, Johnson's death and all the rest of it—and you can't make yourself too sorry if you know what's good for you."

"Well, I'll be darned! That country kid? Are you sure?"

"Did you ever know me to be anything other than sure?" Holdon asked, a self-satisfied smile lighting up his face. "I've had him in here three times and had a man with him nearly every evening for a month—yes, I'm sure." Price whistled, and smiled his worship of the superior man.

"Then about Mickey—we will just have to put up with him; and my advice would be to let him alone."

"I don't know but it's impertinent," Price qualified, "but I'd like to know——"

"Know why Mickey's to stay?" Price nodded, "Well, it's this way: my wife and 'Bee' were down here the afternoon Mickey got hurt. 'No. 1' blew out; we had some green hands on, and I guess they overcharged her. Wife and 'Bee' were just entering the foundry when the thing happened. Mickey was the first one they saw carried out—and the last one, too, I guess." He looked up at Price as he paced back and forth. "You know how women are," he continued, "they were both badly frightened, and the boy was in a bad way. To make a short story of it, my wife never recovered from the shock, not in all the years, and when she was dying her last thought was for the crippled little Irishman. Somehow she got hold of the story that the nine deaths that day were due to the fact that I had locked out my old men and was trying to run the plant with a lot of bums and pickups—she never forgave me."

Price sat down and Holdon remained silent, looking out across the stretch of prairie seen through the window. "I promised her that so long as I controlled here Mickey should have a job—and it wasn't a bad bargain." He got up, and after drumming on the win-

dow for a minute, turned to the superintendent. "I don't like to look at him—he's a constant reminder that had I given in to the men that time my wife might be with me to-day."

Price bowed his head in silence, and Holdon, after fumbling among his papers for a time, said: "As to the other man, Carson, I think you said, I don't believe we should discharge him either. He's been with us a long time and isn't too old. He's industrious, a splendid workman, and, besides, he is safe—not a bit of unionism or Socialism about him. He owns a little home, and that cinches him. Take him all around, he is a man to tie to in case of trouble." He paused as though expecting the superintendent to reply, but as he seemed loath to do so resumed: "My advice would be for you to fix things with Harris—better get him into your office and be good and sorry—it will pay you. Then come to me."

"Very well." Price managed to get these words out before he got to the door, but they came hard.

"And forget the other two," he heard as he started out between the rows of desks, where, by the magic art of tale building, the story regarding his encounter in the shop had grown considerable since he passed that way before.

The day after the killing neither Charley nor Mickey appeared at the works, and that fact was known to Holdon at eight-thirty, just five minutes after he entered his office. Price was sent for, but could throw no light on the subject. Then a messenger was sent post-haste to Mickey's address with orders to phone the office if he succeeded in locating either of the missing men.

Holdon was not in an overly good humor with his superintendent, and showed it. There was a chance that the men had gone to enter complaint with the city authorities. There had been a number of deaths in the big plant within the month and none of them had been reported as the law required. Besides, two of the men, who had been known to be friendless foreigners, had been buried inside the company's grounds to save expenses and possible suits which might have been instituted by hungry lawyers. This had been Johnson's

fate, and Holdon knew it. He also knew it would be exceedingly awkward if the authorities should demand that the company produce his remains, for it was very doubtful whether the half-drunken negroes had been over careful in the execution of their grewsome task the night before.

From contemplating possibilities, Holdon turned to Price.

"What did they do with Johnson?" he asked.

The superintendent had been thinking of possibilities also, and turned uneasily in his chair. It took two efforts to get his throat cleared before he attempted an answer.

"Why, after I left you yesterday Madden came in and wanted to know what to do with him, saying there wasn't any friends to look after the body, so I told him to do the same as he had with Brootsky." (Brootsky had been disposed of two weeks prior to Johnson's taking off.)

"Has he reported to you this morning?" Holdon demanded.

"No, I suppose he thought there was no use to report—he never has——"

The telephone bell.

"You, Tracey?" "Yes—both there? Why didn't they report this morning? Not feeling well?—all right."

"There, that's off my mind," with a smile, the magnate turned from the phone.

"Price, did you see Harris yesterday," he inquired, then added, "Oh, I forgot that you might be interested in knowing that those two friends of yours are safe. They will report for work as soon as Mr. Mickey is fit to scratch again."

Price was too well pleased to learn that they were not looking for officers to investigate the Johnson matter to take exception to the magnate's banter, so smiled a sickly smile as he answered that he had not seen Harris for the very good reason that he had gone home with Mickey.

* * * * * *

What did they do with Johnson?

There is a little flaxen-headed woman on the way

from Sweden who one of these days would give her very life for the answer to that question. Yes, her life. And it is about all she has to give. She has but little more than enough money to pay her way across. What did they do with Johnson? Big-hearted John. He left her to try his fortune in the Great Nation—the famed home of brave men—a country all free. He told her for the hundredth time as her tears fell at thought of parting:

"Hilda, you are one little goose. Will you not see, in that Great Land a man may have a chance—such a chance! And it is only for so little a time, my loved one; only so little a time. Soon I shall send for you. Then we shall be Americans. Think of that, Hilda, and dry those sweet, pretty eyes; we shall be Americans!"

She is coming. How many Hildas have come to our shores? How many more are to come while the wheels in the Mills of Mammon grind out their grist from between great iron burrs that crush, and crush, and crush and always hunger for more, and more, and more? How many more are to come as she comes, while corporations defy the law, rob the dead and living alike, burn, maim, cripple, debauch; wantonly, uselessly, continuously.

She is coming. Will the great gates of the Holdon Company swing open for her, that she may find some of her lover's comrades who may tell her of him? Will its office force be instructed to assist her in her search for the man who promised to make her an American? No, no, no, a thousand times no. A hooting mob of young hoodlums will cry their senseless drivel after her in the streets as she turns away from the gates. A nation will look on coldly at the anguish of a broken-hearted little foreign-born sister of ours, as she takes her way into our grand, free, fair, square life.

Why should this little flaxen-headed woman without money or friends be shown consideration by an American corporation, when men who have families living almost at the gates give up their lives or writhe in agony after one of the "accidents" incident to our hurry-for-dollars, life-be-damned system, while their loved ones are denied the right to see the sufferer, or

know the truth as to his injury, until a company doctor and a company claim adjuster have had their way with the helpless, tortured, broken victim? What right can this little flaxen-headed woman from a far land have to knock upon the gates of the Holdon Company's plant when the police of a great city stand without the walls mocking good citizens of the republic as they insist that they have a right to go to friend or kindred in agony behind those gates?

She is coming. Will some soft-skinned, smooth-voiced seeker after worlds to come tell me: Is our modernized HELL hot enough for the proper reception of the gentlemen who will turn her away from the great gates of the Holdon Company?

Who will tell her the truth? Who knows?

Three drunken negroes were paid five dollars to bury a gunnysack at the back of the Holdon Plant last night.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MICKEY INTRODUCES HIS FRIENDS.

Mickey and Charley enjoyed a two days' vacation before the former felt able to venture back to the works of the Holdon Company.

During that time Charley spent most of his time with Mickey, and they discussed a number of topics, several of which we shall touch upon in this chapter. One topic that never lost interest for Mickey was Price. Charley, in the interests of peace, tried his best to get the cripple to admit that he might be mistaken in his estimate of the superintendent; an estimate summed up in the title of "Stinker" the boy bestowed upon his late antagonist.

"Nixie fer me, Charley," Mickey had insisted when pressed, "it won't go down. Youse don't b'leve none ov it yerself. Youse knows it's bull con, an' de only reason youse dopes it out t' me is cause youse is afraid I'll get inter trouble again. I'm dead next t' th' pipe, but it won't work. Youse see, it's this here way; I've bin a-watchin' dat stinker ever since de boss got him, an' there hain't nothin' to it; he's plum phony t' th' core."

Mickey lay upon a dilapidated lounge in the dilapidated parlor of an equally dilapidated boarding house, while Charley sat at a window watching the boy and wondering how he could have collected the endless variety of odd bits of worldly wisdom he possessed.

"What's yer politics?" the cripple demanded, startling Charley out of a brown study.

"Why, I'm a Republican, I guess, but you know I have been so busy with my machine ever since I was a boy that I never had much to do with politics but to vote twice."

"Do youse know why youse is a 'Publican?"

"Well, no,—I can't say, unless it's because we saved

the country, and my father votes the ticket," Charley replied, laughing.

"Jist w'at he said! Exac'ly w'at he said!" Mickey sat up and punctuated the air with his fists.

"What who said?"

"W'y, a barker on de street. One night 'bout a month ago I seed a gang on a street corner, an' a bloke a-wavin' his han's, an' a-givin' 'em hark. So I goes over an' squeezes inter th' mob t' listen t' de gent, an' dat's w'at he tells dem guys. Says he, 'If youse asks a Dimocrat 'r a 'Publican why dey is one of dem things, he's on'y got one thing t' say t' youse, an' dat is, "I'm a Dimocrat 'cause me fader was one," or "I'm a 'Publican 'cause we fit an' died fer de country.' Say, de gent jist went on an' ripped th' eternal stuffin' outen both th' Dimocrats an' the 'Publicans; an' he did give sich fellers as our boss th' very hell,—w'y, that feller says de kids even don't stand no show if sich men as Old Man Holdon wants t' bile 'em up inter soap—do youse b'leve dat?" He looked straight at Charley with a face all seriousness.

"Of course not—that was what we call exaggeration, Mickey. You see I was a kid once, and they didn't boil me up, or grind me up, either. If the rich men went to grinding the boys up where would we get our men?"

Mickey ran his hand down over a withered hip. As he did so the memory of his suffering caused him to wince.

"But here's me, Charley," he protested, "an' dey burned me up——"

"Oh, that was an accident; I don't suppose Mr. Holdon was to blame."

"Wasn't?" There was a wealth of contempt in the one word, and more as he poured out the rest. "Th' hell th' wasn't. Say, I thought th' same, but I've changed me mind. See here, dey locked th' good men out ov de works an' hired police bulls an' fly cops t' guard th' plant. An' me bein' nothin' but a boy, they induces me t' stay an' work, an' I didn't know no better—den dey brings in a bunch ov scabs frum somewheres, an' dey was all dubs an' muckers. But Holdon sets 'em t' monkeyin' wid de furnaces fer a bluff t' make the ol' men

think de plant was a-goin' t' work. 'Course I knowed dey was green, ef I was jist a kid, but I didn't know dey was goin' t' blow her up—well, dey got me—I was burned awful—an' sometimes w'en I gits t' thinkin' w'at a spry kid I was 'fore den, I wishes t' God they'd a-finished me an' sent me on t' th' soap fact'ry de gent told about."

Charley sat silent, regarding this being, robbed of boyhood and denied the possibility of manhood.

"De spouter on de street hit it off right, all right, when he told dem guys how every kid ought t' have a chanct t' get a good ejucation, have a good home t' live in, an' plenty t' eat. Den he shot de stuff right into th' Dimocrat and 'Publican parties fer a keepin' th' poor folks' kids in de fact'rys, an' out ov de schools, 'cause th' rich guys wants th' earth, an' all de poor kids can make t' boot. By th' Old Harry, it's so, too! An' if youse don't b'leve it I can show youse thousands ov poor kids w'at don't know nothin' but work, an' they has ter live jist like he says."

"But we have all our schools full, Mickey, and there are just oceans and oceans of boys and girls who don't have to work; besides——"

"'Sides nothin'!" the boy protested, hotly. "Dey ain't never had no school full ov me—an' I ain't one ov dem oceans an' oceans youse says don't have t' work, am I? Well, it's me I'm a-talkin' about—an' I guess dat gent was a-talkin' th' same way. What chanst have I had t' git w'at's in me nut sorted out so's I could use it? Nixie! It's me t' de sand pile an' de scrap dump. An' jist think ov it. Dat gent says as how his party, th' Sociablists, is a-goin' ter take ev'ry runty kid outen de fact'rys an' give 'em long trips on th' railroads an' steamboats, an' put 'em in school, an' make men an' women ov 'em. D' youse think it kin be done, Charley?" There was a wealth of pleading earnestness in the Irish blue eyes as Mickey asked the question. The visitor temporized:

"Well, Mickey, it ought to be done, that's sure."

"Jist w'at he says. I'll be litter'ly blistered ef it ain't jist w'at th' gent says youse 'ud say."

"How's that?"

"W'y dis way. Dat gent says: 'Ladies an' gents, ef

youse askes me 'Publican er Dimocrat frien's ef de things I'm telling youse isn't jist as they ought t' be, they'll say sure t'ing, it's all right, all right; but how th' hell are youse goin' ter git it?' An' he winds up by sayin' dat, spite ov anything, they is goin' t' git things comin' deir way, an' I t'row up me lid an' hollers like I's a Ingin an' when they passes de hat I seen Fly Boyd drop a whole dollar in th' dicer."

"Who is this Fly Boyd?" Charley asked, in an effort to get away from politics, where he felt he was in deep water even with Mickey.

"Who's Fly Boyd? Say, anybody could tell as how youse ain't bin in de mertropolis long. Who's Fly Boyd?" he repeated, "why, she's a topnotcher an' don't youse try to fergit it. Wouldn't no more look at a common dub like youse dan nothin' in de world. Why, she's traveled—bin t' Europe an' all dem places where folks as is some shakes don't wear no close t' speak ov, an' she has money t' burn. She's got a swell joint, down on Mich-ave an' don't keep no mollies 'round but jist t' keep t'ings a-lookin' swell. Anything dey gits in deir socks is clear velvet; an' dey don't have no rent t' pay, er nothin'. An' purty! Say, when Fly Boyd was run off dey shook out de sand and split up de pattern as soon as ever dey got through."

Charley laughed heartily at Mickey's description of this woman of the town, and asked: "How in the world did you get acqauinted with this dream of yours —pipe dream, isn't it?"

"Pipe dream nothin'. I bin t' her place on Mich-ave, an' know me nut's on straight when I talks."

"You've been to her house?"

"Sure, Mike! Don't sound right when youse look at me, but it's on de level. Youse see I knowed a girl what worked in a 'graving plant, an' whilst she was dere one ov th' clerks got t' makin' goo-goo eyes at her, an' she bein' young an' so purty she thought dey wasn't no use ov no man a-lookin' at her an' not fallin' dead in love t' onct, lets this Johnnie tell her she's de onliest piece of calico in th' world—an' she a-knowin' it fore he told it t' her made it all th' easier fer him, see? Well, she jist melts in his arms, but don't come out ov it soon enough. Course she thinks he's a-goin' ter mar-

ry her, an' this Johnnie helps her t' think so as long as she is fit t' be seen at the plant. Then he up an' tells her she better not come no more. Nacherly she fires up an' tells him he's bin puttin' off th' ringing' ov them weddin' bells 'bout as long as she'll stand fer, an' he fixes it all up slick an' nice; inducin' her t' go t' de boss an' lie t' him by tellin' that she is 'bout t' marry a man in Hammond, an' won't he please pay her her full time, as she must quit her job. Say, that welsher was slick, all right, all right. When she goes home—her folks lives jist across de street—youse can see de house—th' one with th' big winder in de roof like. When she quits her job she nacherly tells her folks she's goin' ter marry t' dis welsher, an' she waits an' waits, but he never shows up after he gits her t' quit de plant. Then her brother goes down t' de plant an' asks fer his nibs; an' what he done t' dat cuss wasn't half ernough, even ef he did have ter go t' de hospital. Course th' brother had t' skip, an' Mamie, she's de girl, gets peakeder an' peakeder an' finally one day she comes up missin'. It's a whole year 'fore I sees her agin; an' would youse b'leve it, when she first sees me she pulls me inter a doorway, an' hugs an' kisses me, an' jist nacherly insists that I must go home wid her an' tell her all th' news. So I goes, some wondering, and she takes me t' Fly Boyd's joint, fer that's where she lives."

"Mamie, the girl that ran away from home?" Charley asked.

Naw, she didn't run away. I seen her when she made her git-a-way, an' she wasn't runnin'. Well, she make me promise as how I won't say a word t' her old folks nor nobody 'bout a-seein' her, an' den she let me inter de whole works. Say, it was all a false alarm 'bout dat baby, she ain't got none, told me so herself. Dat's how I got acquainted with Fly Boyd an' Jim Gardner—th' squares' man in de world."

Mickey lay back on the battered old lounge and gazed at the smoke-blackened ceiling, while Charley let his eyes wander from time to time toward the house with the big window in the roof on the other side of the street; but his mind was busy sorting the queer mixture of wisdom and innocence and ignorance, lying on

the lounge and for the time being deeply interested in the smoky ceiling.

After studying the boy for a time, he said: "I'm very inquisitive, Mickey, and would like first rate to know something about this Jim Gardner—"The squarest man in the world."

Mickey turned quickly. "W'y, I told you, didn't I —he's square? Jist like you, only differenter. Youse is—is—well——"

Laughing heartily, Charley encouraged him to go on.

"Well, youse is good, an' on de level—but youse don't know no better."

Charley's eyes were wide open. "I don't know any better than to be good, while Jim Gardner——"

"Is good, too," Mickey interrupted, "but it's a differenter kind ov good—he knows better, but jist can't help being good most ov de time. W'y, he's a gent."

Mickey crowded into those four words all the longing, all the day dreams and night visions of his poor, cramped and misshapen life—"W'y, he's a gent."

"What does he do?" The questioner really wondered what revelation was to come to him as the fruit of his question.

"He's in de syndicate; but he had ter work like th' devil t' break in. I heard him tell Fly dat."

"What syndicate?"

"Well, it's me t' de dump! An' youse don't even know dat? Why I—ain't youse heard ov th' men at de head ov th' policy shops and big lay-outs uptown?—say, youse is too green t' burn."

"Oh," Charley observed, calmly. "He's one of the big gamblers; is that it?"

"Yep, dat's de dope." Mickey sat up straight. "Dat's jist w'at he is—an' if dey hadn't a-burnt me t' a cracklin' w'en I wasn't nutting but er kid, maybe I'd a-bin as big a man, an' as great a gent as Jim Gardner."

Horrified, Charley made protest. "Why, Mickey," said he, "gambling is wrong—and the kind of life Mamie and Fly Boyd lead is sinful. I don't see——"

"No, youse don't see. Why, damn it all, Charley, ain't dem gospel sharks gamblers? Didn't dey take me mon, an' not even give me a look-in fer me coin? An' when it comes t' Mamie an' Fly—say, w'en our boss

gits his name in de papers fer givin' a thousan' bucks t' de church, he's called good, ain't he?"

Charley nodded.

"An' w'en he goes down t' Fly's joint, er sends fer her t' go up t' his 'partments on Monroe, an' gives her a even hundred bucks fer takin' away his headache er something like dat—w'at is he?"

"But he don't do it," Charley protested.

"Don't he!" Mickey put all the contempt possible into a few words, and plunged on: "Maybe I keeps Mamie posted on th' doin's out here, an' don't get nothin' back, an' maybe I does. Anyway, youse can take it from me, our boss is jist as bad as me friends Mamie an' Fly, an' a darned site worser dan Jim Gardner. If I was t' tell Jim Gardner how Stinker Price used me, de stinker'd be mighty lucky ef he didn't get his block knocked off some dark night, fer Jim 'ud send a slugger out t' do him up."

When Mickey ceased speaking Charley sat for some time wrestling with his conscience. He saw the possibility of losing Mickey's friendship unless he could square himself with Mickey's views of life. It went against the grain, but he did manage to convey to the cripple an assurance that he would gladly meet "the 'squares' man in de world" and other of Mickey's friends.

"Bet yer life youse would," was the comment returned, with the following elaboration: "Let me put youse wise—w'en Jim Gardner walks inter th' bettin' ring a cloud ov pikers an' de whole push jist follers him up t' th' marker, an' w'en Jim pulls his wad—it's a roll big as me leg, me good one—an' lays his coin like he was a-dealin' in rags; say, they ain't nothin' t' it—he's de candy! Jim bets th' bigges' always, an' w'en de bookies hears he's comin' dey sen's fer all de cash dey's got, in a hurryup on de bank, an' dat's no dream."

"He must be rich," Charley observed.

"Yep, rich as Montgomery Ward an' Co. But, say; I seed him oncet two years ago when a gang cleaned him up fer fair, by pullin' two races on him to oncet. W'en I seed him dat time he didn't have on no shiners, an' he looked plum disgusted. Mamie tol' me 'bout de game, an' she sed Fly was a-keepin' him under cover till he

could git next de gang dat put it over him. An' she did it, too; an' staked him—fer de next time I seed him he's wearing headlights on his front piece, an' he skins a five-spot offen his roll an' says 'Here, Crips,'—he allus calls me Crips—'Here, Crips,' says he, 'go an' enjoy yourself,' an' I did."

"So you think your friend Gardner would send a slugger out to do up Price if you asked him to?" Charley asked banteringly, but as he went home the boy's answer kept him fully occupied.

"Sure, Mike," Mickey had replied, "but don't youse give me away. Lots ov th' men what gits their nut cracked wid a billy, an' loses deir watches an' loose change gits it cause dey's bin piped off t' some ov de fly boys as is hired t' make life miserable fer folks as gits too gay a-nosin' inter other folks' biz. Yep, youse kin take it from me—ef Mr. Price comes up t' th' office some mornin' wid a busted nut, youse'll know me friends is not all dead. What, youse goin' so soon? Shucks, it ain't late yit."

"Well, I'll see youse to th' works in de mornin'," he called after his visitor.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE VISION FADES.

Mickey and Charley both felt a bit shaky the morning they went back to work when they saw Price. He was still wearing court-plaster in strips when he came into the moulding room. Seeing them, he cast down his eyes and flushed up, but made straight for them nevertheless.

Mickey hopped over to Charley's side and whispered: "We gits de 'can' as sure as you're born."

"All right, Mickey, we'll pull through any way," the man answered, encouragingly.

Price advanced, and holding out his hand to Charley said: "Mr. Harris, I owe you an apology; I was brutal the other day."

"You were rather hard pressed," Harris paused. "The thing I regretted," his left hand pointed toward Mickey, "was that you should——"

"I understand fully, Mr. Harris, and assure you I am as ready to make things right with Mickey." The superintendent was beaming.

"No youse don't," declared Mickey. "Youse kin give me de G. B. P. D. Q., but dis chicken don't take none ov de brand ov soap youse peddles."

After this declaration, Mickey limped away and busied himself at the sand blast, while both Harris and Price seemed at a loss to know how to bridge over the cripple's awkward speech.

Carson, the big moulder, who had overheard the speech, grinned his broadest.

Price was first across. "He's never been right since his accident," he asserted, and while Harris mumbled an indistinct reply, his visitor was gone, having found business elsewhere.

Two weeks later Charley was called to the office and found Price busy with some papers.

"Sit down, Mr. Harris," the superintendent motioned to a chair. "I'm busy just for the moment."

Charley wondered what Price could possibly want of him, he was cudgeling his brain for an answer, when Price handed the papers he had been examining to his stenographer and told her he would excuse her for a short time.

Turning to face Harris, he inquired—"Ever indulge?" and pushed a box of cigars toward him.

"Now, Mr. Harris," he began, when both cigars were well alight, "You may be surprised when I tell you why I sent for you. You see, Martin (the man Holdon had hired to pump Harris) has told me in a casual way that you are working on an automatic moulding machine." Harris nodded. "And, well, as I too have been working on one for years, I thought we might have some ideas to exchange. I understand your machine is only in the experimental stage."

"It's out of the experimental stage, Mr. Price. It was a success as I first built it."

Price's eyes glowed.

"Well, you are ahead of me; my machine is only on paper, but I am thinking seriously of patenting the principles involved."

This was all a lie out of whole cloth; Price had never had an idea, let alone developing a machine.

"But I should think it would be best to build a machine to test the value of your invention before patenting it" the mechanic ventured.

"Oh, that's all right." Price laughed lightly. "I know that my machine is all right." At that, he went on to describe a machine so nearly like the one Harris had broken up in Holcomb's barn, that the mechanic's heart almost stood still.

"You—you say you have this machine planned out on paper, drafted?" Harris asked helplessly.

"Yes, and I was just ready to have a model constructed and sent in when Martin happened to mention that you have been working along the same lines."

"Well, Mr. Price, I am sure I appreciate your telling me this, for there is but little use for two of us to apply for patents on practically the same machine."

Harris had aged ten years in as many minutes. Price

noted it all and gloated over having found an easy victim.

"Machines alike!" he exclaimed. "Did I hear you right?"

"I said alike, but I suppose I might be able to claim improvement in the compound for making the mold."

Charley's face took on more of hope as he thought of the great difference there would be between the machine he wanted to build and the one just described by Price. "And my machine will have twice the speed that can be given any machine that uses a tamped flask," he asserted.

"Well, it's interesting, anyway," Price declared, "just think how odd it is that we two should have been working out the same problems. And I don't mind telling you that I am working along the line you just mentioned."

The speaker's sharp black eyes never left Charley's face. He had his victim; that last shot was a winner. The worker had never thought of the "how" other workers had been robbed of the fruits of years of labor and he sat helpless.

"But, you know, inventors are clannish and so long as you have worked on the same sort of machine or at least a machine to accomplish the same ends; why I thought it no more than right to tell you about it."

"I thank you," Harris murmured in a choked voice and hardly knowing what he did, got up, put on his cap and started to leave the office.

Outside, there was at least escape from the near presence of this man, who had robbed his life of the sum total of its gladness; robbed labor of its song and sent his soul reason hunting among past misdeeds. He had reached the door; the cold eyes of the superintendent were dancing as he called to him.

"Mr. Harris?"

"Yes," he answered, still feeling blindly for a knob where it did not exist.

"Come and sit down; we ought to talk this matter over a little further, and——"

"No, it's not necessary," the man at the door replied.

"See here, Mr. Harris, I am sorry I beat you to it,

as the boys say, but as you have already built one machine, why couldn't you take the job of building both the model and a trial machine for me?"

"Never!" The man at the door found the way out.

"Darned tough medicine to take, and I certainly gave him a good dose. I wouldn't want to put in such a night as he will go through tonight. But, wasn't he easy; never asked for a single proof or anything else. And yet, he's bright." He reached over, touched a button and the stenographer returned.

In the quiet little four room cottage where Charley and Mary Harris had established their home, there was little of mirth the night after Charley's interview with Price.

From the office, he had gone back to the casting floor, but how he put in the hours until the great whistle sounded his release, he never knew.

He walked from the works to his home, and at each step, the weight upon him seemed to grow. It was a tell-tale face into which Mary looked as her husband entered the door.

"Gracious Charley, what's happened?" she asked even before she reached him.

"I have been dreaming." He threw his dinner pail into a corner.

"What is it, Charley, what is it?"

"Nothing, only I found some one who woke me up. Oh, what a fool! what a fool!" He pushed her away. "Go away and leave me alone for a little while."

"Not until you tell me," she insisted.

"Well then,—another man as good as holds a patent on my machine. And he has money. He can go ahead tomorrow and I must wait until these two hands may dig up, by a few cents a day, the money I need to build my machine. He can hire a dozen men tomorrow. I can go back to work in the morning and eat my heart out."

"I don't believe it."

"Believe what?"

"That another man has invented that machine. If anyone has it, they stole it from you."

"Didn't he tell me what his claim on a moulding ma-

chine covers? Well, he had no chance to steal it from me. It was Price, our superintendent."

"I won't believe it," Mary declared, and tried to coax a smile to his lips, but the hurt was too deep.

During supper Charley had not uttered a word, and suddenly Mary burst out crying.

"There, there, little girl, don't cry; we'll pull through," he assured her.

"It just seems as if mother's curse was following us," she whispered between sobs. "There was our baby, and it died, and now you have lost all you have."

Charley listened that far, then said: "Mary, dear, you must quit thinking about your mother's foolish words. I'll own, we are having our share of bad luck, but sweetheart, we are both young."

"Hello, youse spoonin' again?" came a cheery voice from the front door.

"Come in, Mickey," Charley called to the visitor.

"Not fer mine, when de air's full ov ambrosia, and blowin' towards de stock yards at dat," Mickey declared as he threw himself upon the platform at the front door.

He sat with his back up against the house for about ten minutes, when Charley excused himself and went back to the kitchen. When he returned, the two sat silent for at least ten minutes longer, then Charley excused himself again, and this time Mary returned with him.

After a good evening to Mickey, the group remained silent until Mickey got up, stretched himself and remarked: "Purty early fer frost, but I feels like dey was one billed fer dis end of town, an' I guess I'll make me sneak before it settles on me."

"Don't go, Mickey; I'm not just—well, not feeling over cheerful tonight."

"Bin on de carpet? Get 'canned?' "

The visitor knew Charley had been called to the office.

"No, I didn't get canned. I got something worse," Charley answered.

"Worse'n de 'can?' W'y, w'at's worse?"

"Mickey, I was robbed of years of labor, of hope, of happiness, today."

"Don't say that Charley," came between sobs from the doorway.

"I will say it." The man's voice was hard. "I will say it; I was robbed, robbed, robbed! What have I been since that machine first came to my mind? Nothing under heaven but a plaything in the hands of a single dominant idea. I planned all my life around that machine. I ate that the machine might grow. I forgot God, man, wife, all, even my own appetites, and gave up both days and nights to it. Fool, that I was; if I had only had sense enough to take out patents on the machine I built, but no, it wasn't perfect. Now, I am robbed of even the perfect machine and——" he hesitated, ran his fiingers through his hair, and hurried on, "I could have killed him; for a moment I wanted to; I was almost mad."

"Who swiped yer machine?" Mickey looked up puzzled.

"Oh, Mickey, he don't know what he's saying, he don't mean that any one has stolen it from him. Mr. Price has invented one just like it and he has money to go ahead and get it out."

"Stinker Price over to th' works?"

"Yes," Harris answered.

"Th' hell he did! W'y, say, he's a stringin' youse. Him! Why, he don't know enough t' invent nothin' bigger ner better'n a sneaky, low-lived lie."

"But, he has invented a machine so near like mine, that it's useless for me to waste——"

"Cut it out, Charley, it's a stall. An' anyways, I don't want to hear dat stinker's name mentioned less de one as does it is a cussin' him good and plenty. Good night." Mickey started toward the street.

"Come back," Mary called to him.

"Not fer mine," came from the cripple, as he hobbled through the gateway.

For two days after his interview with Harris, the superintendent of the Holdon plant lived in an atmosphere surcharged with satisfaction. Twice each day he found business to take him to the casting floor and four times he noted the disheartened, dull-eyed worker, who had once had a vision, and the more the worker

grieved, the more reason the superintendent had to rejoice.

There was but one little cloud in his sky. On the same job with Harris, there was one Mickey Dougherty, and if ever unstinted contempt looked out of eyes, if ever good, honest Irish wrath, ready to to leap into flame, flared out from Irish eyes of blue, Price got the full benefit of their charge on each trip made to the casting floor.

"That twisted little devil," he muttered as he returned from a trip to the shop. "He looks at me just as though he would like to put a bullet through me."

The third morning after his interview with Price, Harris did not show up at the works and when he did not appear the next morning, Moran, knowing the intimacy between Harris and Mickey, inquired of the boy, if Harris was sick. Mickey gave his wits to the problem and answered: "Yes," then added: "He asked me t' git off dis mornin'—at noon, I mean, an' do a errand fer him."

"All right," said the foreman, you can go at noon. Get back as soon as you can; if he is going to be away for some time, I want to put a man on his work."

When Mickey reached the little cottage in which Harris had lived, he found a "For Rent" sign on both gate and staring windows. A neighbor informed him that they had moved out about 7 o'clock that morning. Where had they gone? No one knew unless it was the agent for the property. Mickey spelled out the name and address of the real estate man and started for his office.

"Darned if I'd a-thought Charley would a done it, an' me as good a frien' as he ever had. He just up an' hiked; wonder was dem furniture sharks after him. Anyways he's gone. My, but he was down in de mouth yesterday an' de day afore. Bet anything, Price had somethin' t' do with his goin' so sudden." Thus Mickey speculated upon the probable reason of his friend's going as he approached the agent's office.

Arrived there, the agent informed him that Harris had moved to Alton, where he is going to work for a stove company. A long whistle was all the thanks Mickey gave the agent for the information.

"And' he's gone plumb outen de mertropolis. Well, he wasn't up t' no city ways, an' I reckon he was plumb ashamed t' tell me he couldn't stan' de gaff." In this way, Mickey justified his friend's unceremonious leave-taking.

As he was about to enter the shop, he overheard Price and Moran in conversation, and halted with his ear at an open window where he could hear.

"You say he's sick?" Price asked.

"Yes," Moran answered, "And I sent Mickey at noon to find out how he was."

"Well, as soon as he comes back,, ring me up. I don't want to lose track of him, he's too valuable a man. And while I think of it, I wish you would keep an eye on that cripple, I don't believe he has a good influence in the shop, and it seems to me, he is making a good deal of capital out of his being a cripple."

Mickey bit his lips and waited. "So Price didn't want to lose track of Charley; he was too valuable." Now Mickey was not so dense but that he could put two and two together, and make them count for four every time.

It popped into his head in a moment. Charley had something Price wanted, and therefore it was his plain duty to keep Price from knowing anything about Charley's whereabouts if he could. He walked into the shop and was relieved to find that Price had gone.

"Well, how is he?" Moran called to him from across the room.

"Folks is sick, and he's goin' to take his wife an' go down home fer a week," Mickey answered.

"Funny he didn't come down and tell us," was Moran's comment.

"Would a-done it, but he had t' hurry t' git out o' town t'-day; so I promised t' fix it, knowin' youse wouldn't care long as it was a case ov sickness."

Mickey went at his pile of castings with right good will, and many a sly wink was bestowed upon the cold iron, as he thought how well he had succeeded in giving Price "de wrong steer."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ULTIMATE DEMAND.

"Fly" Boyd sat in the parlor of her apartments, beside the little onyx and gold table, which held place of honor in the great bay-window overlooking the avenue. She awaited the coming of the one man in the world with whom she was in love.

Twenty-eight years ago this woman was born to possess a splendid body, beauty of face, an abundance of gold-brown hair, eyes of hazel, long, sweeping lashes, arched brows, and lips full and curved as artists paint them. With all of this physical perfection, the girl inherited a well organized mentality, a disposition to charity and a capacity for loving almost unbounded, yet we find her here at twenty-eight years of age feeding the vanity of a millionaire, and taking from him and others of whom he knows nothing enough to keep up this splendid establishment, support her charities and leave a little for a rainy day.

If you believe as you should in the inherent virtue of woman you will agree with me that somewhere in the life of "Fly" Boyd there must have been shipwreck, moral shipwreck, and if there was this shipwreck, you will not dispute me when I insist that a man intent only upon making this girl believe a lie in order that he might feast at the expense of her soul held the wheel and drove her ship upon the rocks.

But our story has nothing to do with this shipwreck.

She enters our story at a time when but few men, married or single, priest or layman, might look unmoved upon her beauty. She enters our story at a time when her experience has given her exact knowledge of the present worth, in dollars and cents, of the marvelous battery of mental and physical attributes of which she is possessed.

The world is a-weary of the grossly sordid and bestial stories of women who trade in the lusts of men, as published from day to day in ever increasing volume in our daily press. But this woman is not a degenerate. She is womanly, full of sympathy for her less fortunate sisters in shame; and, capable of supreme love, she uses her ability to turn the appetites of polygamous mankind into gold, and as the lavish outpouring of their treasure falls at her feet, it is caught up and poured out in large part into a hundred channels through which it reaches poor souls in direst need.

This woman waits the coming of the man she loves. Who is this one man who may have her love?

Enter Mamie, bearing a card tray.

"Fly" took the card, "Jim," she exclaimed.

"Yes, Jim," comes a voice from the doorway.

The rich color climbed from neck to hair, up over her beautiful face as she went toward him.

"And welcome," she murmured.

Jim Gardner, "Gent," Mickey's "squares' man in de world," looked hungrily into the brown eyes uplifted to his.

"Well, "Fly," are you going with me?" he inquired.

"No, Jim, I've made other plans." She paused.

"Other plans!" Jim spoke in a tone that implied both surprise and disappointment.

"Yes, other plans," the woman looked down and seemed ill at ease under her lover's eyes.

"But 'Fly,' you know we had agreed that when I went East you should go with me, and Judson has wired that we can make a killing. I wanted to show those New Yorkers the most fascinating thing in the way of a woman they ever looked upon."

"And, Jim, you wanted—you want to parade me as so much fancy stock."

"No, no, 'Fly'—not that!" he protested.

"Yes, Jim, just that. "You have just two motives in asking me to go, you want me and all I can give you; then you want the satisfaction of knowing that every man who can be influenced by such a feeling will be jealous of you and covet me."

Gently releasing herself from his arms, she stood before him, bright-eyed and serious.

"God, but you are ravishingly beautiful to-day."

A pout came to her lips and her face clouded. Jim noted the change and blurted out: "What in the world is the matter, Flora?"

"Not that name from you." "Fly" stamped her foot. "I've told you before——"

"Girl, girl, are you going to turn out like the ordinary woman?" he questioned peevishly.

"No, James Gardner, I am not and—, but what's the use, Jimmie, you won't understand me. You, who know me if any man does, who always say I am different from other women, even you give me nothing that other women may not claim of you."

"'Fly,' I don't understand you at all. Let's quit talking in riddles. Tell me the truth—why won't you go with me?"

"Because another man offers more for my companionship," came from her lips almost in a whisper.

Jim Gardner sat stunned. For five years this woman had professed to love him, and as he sat blinking his big blue eyes at her he remembered the sacrifices, big and little, she had made for him. She, his one sure rock in time of stress, more mother than mistress, had led him out of difficulties; had bought him liberty, had staked him when he was "broke," had nursed him back to health when he was sick. This woman, whom he had proudly told himself, and immensely tickled his vanity in the telling, loved him, now stood before him dry-eyed and informed him that another offered her more than he could give.

"I won't stand for it, 'Fly!' " he blurted out, and finished lamely, "I want you; I can't go without you!"

"Will you pay my price?"

He looked up and laughed.

"Name it, girlie, name it; and if it takes my last red copper, it's yours."

"Oh, Jim, if you only meant that."

"Well, try me."

"Will you marry me?" As she asked the question she was at his feet sobbing out: "Do it, Jimmie, I am so tired of this."

Jim's hands fell across her shoulders. "There, there, girlie, don't cry. I can't stand it."

"But will you?" She looked up blushing like a girl.

"Will I? Well, hardly."

There was nothing of harshness in his voice, yet the woman winced as under a lash.

"Just one more chance, Jimmie," her eyes sought his, but he avoided a direct look. "Take your time, I'm waiting." Again the regal head dropped.

"What's come over the woman?" Jim asked himself as he stroked the brown locks. "Just a whim; she'll be well over it in ten minutes." Then, aloud—"'Fly,' you are not yourself this morning, and in an hour you'll be laughing with me over your own fool question."

"Is that your answer?"

"The only one I've got with me," the man answered lightly.

The next instant a new woman, one whom he had never before seen, was upon her feet and pointing toward the door.

"Go, Jim; go before I go mad; mad enough to kill you."

"In the name of God, Fly, what ails you?" he gasped.

"Go, go, you brute! And I have loved you so! O God, I have loved you so! Go away from me!" she screamed, as he attempted to take her in his arms. "Leave me, or, before God, I'll tell you something that will scorch your soul, if you have one."

He persisted and Fly ran to the little table in the bay window. Reaching under it she pulled out a revolver and faced the man she loved.

"Not a step, Jim; not one, or, as sure as there's a God I'll kill you, and your're too much the coward to die; too much the coward."

Jim stood white-faced and trembling, his eyes held to hers in dread fascination.

"You wouldn't go, you drove me to tell you. Oh, Jim, if you had only been half the man I have tried to believe you to be! If you had shown only one spark of clean love for me, the woman. No, all you want is my body, all you have ever wanted, all you have ever seen in me was a thing out of which you could feed yourself. Faugh! When I think of all I have suffered for

you—you—I could kill you. Years ago, I gave you money, a home, a place to hide, and I have caressed the sweaty, gouty, pauchy brutes who held the power to punish you. And you, you poor bit of handsome emptiness, went free and came again at feeding time. And you dare to spurn my love, you, who have tested it in all the fires of the hell in which we struggle. I, the fool, the supreme fool, with every sacrifice made for you, you dog, I hugged to myself the belief that any day I wanted to put you to the test, any day I wanted to try you, would be to me the greatest day in my life. Look at me!" She swayed as though about to fall. Jim took one big step toward her with outstretched arms and halted. "Stop!" The revolver was held in a hand steady once more. "Don't play with death, Jim, you need to live as long as all women who love are fools." He dropped his head under the utter contempt of her eyes. "Listen, Jim Gardner." Fly tapped the barrel of her revolver upon the table top. "You think yourself too good to marry me, and you are going out of this room to try to forget me; but, empty as you are, you have so much need for me that you would be back here whining to be fed like any other tramp within a month. Now listen, I swear that I will kill you if you ever speak to me. And if you ever talk of your conquest of me to the fools who will love you, and I find it out, I will follow you to the ends of the earth and hire, with my kisses, some other little dog to put you away. Now go!"

The woman dropped her revolver and clutched at the frail table for support. At each step of the retreating figure her heart was torn, and when he had reached the portal, her anguish became audible. Jim heard and half turned, but did not comprehend; another step and the heavy draperies had fallen behind him. Had he but known when that stifled cry reached him that the woman's power for resistance was at it's ebb, had he but known, he might have walked back and taken her in his arms and held her slave to his will at his own price. But he did not know. Too dazed to have a connected thought, he stumbled down to the street, and taking the first empty cab drove to the Eagle.

"I will follow you to the ends of the earth and hire, with my kisses, some other little dog to put you away. Now go!"—Page 246.

In her beautiful parlor a woman lies unconscious upon the floor; there Mamie found her a few minutes later.

"Lost! Lost!" was her moan as faithful servants crowded about at Mamie's call.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN JIM LACKED SAND.

James Gardner was put to bed the night Fly Boyd had driven him from her Michigan avenue apartment by his man George.

In the first hours of his defeat he told himself he didn't care a rap, and at each repetition of this assertion he had imbibed another glass, until in the end George was sent for, and his master went to bed crying like a baby and assuring George that "She's the bes-h-t, bes-h-t woman in the worl', by gad! An' she'll come roun' all right, all right!" It was different in the morning. His first sense was one of outraged innocence, and he did the principal part in the play. When his head would consent to think for him he summed it up about like this:

"She was bluffing you, Jim, just plain bluff, and if you had called her hand she would have thrown her cards on the table. All women like to make themselves believe they own a man, and Fly wants a bill of sale for me. Why, if I'd have said, 'Yes, I'll marry you,' she would have loved me to death for a month and talked about nothing but life in a cottage; then she would have taken another tack. I was too innocent."

At night he had still another view of the matter.

"Say, I wonder what she meant when she stamped her pretty little foot and told me not to dare call her Flora? I remember now; she told me one night a year or more ago that she hoped I might call her Flora some time. I wonder if she does love me so much that she wants to give up the others? I wonder if she does? Now, I never felt that way about her. If she was my wife, it would be different. I'd kill her if she—oh, hell, what's the use. I don't want a wife; this suits me."

"Say, Jim, wasn't she just about the most glorious picture you ever saw in your life, when she grabbed up

the gun and sang out, 'Go, you dog!' Did she call me a dog? I don't distinctly remember, but it sounds right when hitched on to the gun play?"

The next day he had still another view.

"That old pie-faced Holdon, he's the boy who swung her over. I wouldn't have believed it if Murphy hadn't told it; say, but she's fly! Here's me, doing things for her all these years, when along comes this millionaire; what sort of con does he give her? I suppose something like this: 'I saw you with Jim Gardner not long ago. Now, my girl, if you want a chance to touch up my heirs for a million or two after I am dead and gone, you just give Mr. Gardner to understand that he is not expected to arrive any more; then pay strict attention to me.' That's about the way she took it from him, even if he didn't say it in so many words; and didn't she pass it on to me in a lovely manner? Tragedy queens get a thousand bucks per, and Fly Boyd's got 'em all skinned."

The next day but one he had still another revelation.

"There's been some one lyin' to the girl. Now, I come to think of it, I haven't been paying attention to any woman but her. Now, that is strange. Darned if it isn't a strange sort of business. Well, now, let's see: some mollie who's got it in for me goes to Fly and says: 'Jim Gardner's telling what a killing he has made with you and that all he has to do is whistle and you'll love the whole city government for a month, just to get him out of trouble.' I did hear a man say that once. Well, the mollie goes to Fly and puts it up to her that way, then she sits down and digs a plan out of her dear little head to put me to the test. 'I'll ask him to marry me, and if he refuses, I'll know the stories they are telling about him, calling me easy, are true.'

"And say, Jim, you chump, you fell into the trap for all the world like a clay pigeon goes out of one."

A week later he had still another view of the situation.

"Say, old man, there's no two ways about it. Fly Boyd either loves you or all the dope sheets put out by the historical novel writers are dead wrong. Didn't she call me a dog and tell me not to play with death and

ordered me to go, and all the time her eyes were asking me to come and take the gun away from her? Lord, what an idiot I was! If I had just taken the barker and told her I'd be up at nine p. m. and talk it over, she would have laughed and kissed me and I'd been all to the good. Instead, I'm stung, and stung deep, too. Of course she loves me; every sign of it, and whenever I'm ready to go back to her—well, I'll keep her waiting long enough to teach her that gun play is dangerous, even when you don't shoot. No, I won't. I'll go over this afternoon and have it all over. Gee, just thinking about how good she's going to be to me almost pays for the unpleasant things I've had to mull over for a week now."

James Gardner, square gambler, big sport, and as brave a man face to face with one of his own tribe as ever stood in shoe leather, north, south, east or west, drove to the neighborhood of Fly's abode, dismissed the cab and then sneaked around the corner, and after a furtive look at the brown-stone front sneaked back again out of sight.

"My, but I'm a brave man; guess I better mosey around the block and see if I can't get my sand working by the time I get around."

Three-fourths of the way around, he struck the Michigan avenue pavement. Straight north, six doors from where he stood, was the brown-stone front, behind which all his trouble was to vanish as soon as he got his sand to working. But his feet dragged and his sand failed to materialize. He was within ten seconds of his destination.

"Say, Jim, you are a poor, ornery chicken-hearted chump; there are but three women in that house, and one of them is dead in love with you. Get a move on yourself."

He started, halted, went on again, and sneaked by, looking neither up nor down, right nor left, until he reached and turned the corner where he had dismissed his cab.

"Confound the luck! I'd like to know what made my heart act that way? Why, it's dangerous to have the thing jumping around in a fellow like that, it might get loose."

He mopped the perspiration from his brow, replaced his hat, walked back to the spot from which he had reconnoitered before going around the block.

"No use, Jim. You're plumb woozy. You might find sand enough to tackle a dray load of devils, but this is different."

At the Auditorium bar Jim Gardner looked shamefacedly at a couple of friends and wondered if they suspected what a double-distilled fool he was.

The next week Jim had gotten deep enough into the problem to fairly understand its beginnings. Murphy had told him that Fly and Holdon had gone East on the same train.

He had tried to take the news without an outward show of feeling, but Murphy, the best friend he had in the world, excused himself as soon as he could after imparting his news and muttered, as he went down the street: "Poor old Jim, I wouldn't have done it if I'd known how he'd take it."

Jim followed Murphy and walked out toward Michigan avenue. He halted in front of a cafe he frequented, then turned down the street.

"No booze for yours to-day, Jim," he told himself. "This thing you're up against is too serious to be thought out through booze."

He tramped for hours and returned to his rooms tired out. George brought the ingredients for a whisky and soda, but Jim Gardner, who couldn't remember when he had refused before, pushed the stuff away and asked to be left alone for the evening.

He carefully took up the threads of life from the day he had met Fly Boyd. One by one, he checked off the services she had rendered him. One by one, he brought back items of cash she had advanced; and he had not repaid. Here he buried his face until its heat was felt in his delicate gambler's fingers. From that he went on to the day when he had gone to her and pleaded that she "fix" certain officials, in order that he might escape conviction for a swindle in which he was implicated and which would have sent him to Joliet. He had known that she had done this thing; how, he had never asked. What had she said? It came to him—her burning, passion-scorched words. He thought of

her sweet body, her love of cleanliness, and, like a hound on the scent, his mind flew to the men with whom she had dealt in seeking his freedom. As he passed them before him in mental review, as each new face came up leering and bestial, Fly Boyd's cry in protest against this thing that had been demanded of her cut into his heart; to gain relief, he swore he would have vengeance on the men.

Then came a vision of a darkened room, and the memory of a woman. Her hands ministered to him, her voice lulled him to sleep and came first to him when he awoke. Through the weeks of convalescence she had brought sunlight to him, and when he was strong enough to take her in his arms—now he remembered the look of rapture, the hot, red blushes—oh, he had been blind, and all these years he had fed upon her bounty, her love.

"Within a month you will be back, whining like any other tramp to be fed." Hadn't he gone in just that spirit? And all the time she had loved him, and hoped that love would find an answer in his heart.

"She was right, Jim, right as a rivet. You are a dog, a dirty, dirty dog. She would have done the world a service if she had put a bullet into you that day. If all women were like her there would be less dogs in the world. But, Jim Gardner, look yourself in the eye, and tell me, are you nothing but 'a handsome piece of emptiness?' That's what she called you."

He looked into the pier glass, drew himself to his full height, and, shaking his fist at the image of a perfect specimen of physical manhood, concluded: "Jim, you won't give her up, will you? No, not in this life. That's right, old man; stick to it."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MOCK MARRIAGE.

When Fly Boyd awoke the morning after Jim Gardner's departure she awoke to an old world with a new meaning. She had seen to it that Jim would know that Holdon was courting her. But so long as she had faith that Jim would respond to her appeal and through marriage lift her above the traffic of the street, she looked upon Holdon only as a means to gain this end.

This morning, she recast her lines, and as she walks back and forth, back and forth across the soft carpeted floor, she reminds one of a splendid tigress, restlessly pacing the space allotted to her behind fixed bars. The fixed bars in Fly Boyd's life were bars to respectability; she had labored for years to win one man to unlock the door that led out between those bars into the great world beyond. Pacing up and down, up and down, facing life with her love a wreck upon the rock of a man's cold sensuality, she rebelled against a society which puts the keys to this door to the woman's cage in the hands of the man, and thus makes it possible for him, however unworthy he may be, to dictate the terms upon which she may gain her release, while he enjoys the privileges of entering her cage at will.

When finally seated at her secretary, pen in hand, she had determined to wage relentless war upon the world beyond the bars, and we shall record the results of that warfare without pausing here to moralize upon the attitude of this woman toward the moral code, our outside-of-the-bars people profess to uphold.

The result of her morning's effort with a pen brought no less a personage than the Hon. Horace Holdon, to her apartments that evening. All the wiles that a beautiful woman learned in the school of cajolery might bring to bear against a man were deftly plied, and in

the end, it was decided that she was to accompany the magnate on his vacation.

In explaining that he might not be able to visit her for three evenings during the next week, the millionaire casually mentioned that he would be in Battle Creek, Michigan, during that time.

Holdon's step was still to be heard on the stair going down, when the woman began plotting to destroy him.

Calling Mamie, she asked the girl to get ready to take a note to a certain cheap hotel on State street.

The note read:

"Dear Tom—I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. Come around to ——— Michigan avenue by nine o'clock to-morrow. I wouldn't ask this of you, but you know you have insisted that you owe me a debt of gratitude; I'm going to let you liquidate it in full. Fly."

Tom Mitchell arrived on time and was ushered into Fly's parlor, to be received with every mark of affection.

"You poor old dear," she pushed him into a stuffed chair. "You are going down hill. What does the doctor say?" She put an extra cushion at his back.

"Six months," was the laconic reply.

"Six months?" She stepped back and looked at him wide-eyed. "Six months?" she repeated, then began upbraiding herself. "Oh, Tom, I hadn't thought of it being anywhere as near as that—only six months."

"That's five months and twenty-nine days too many, unless it takes more than a day to do that piece of work for you."

"No, Tom, we'll cut it out. I can't think of having you expose yourself—you might—take cold."

"Why, Fly, you talk like a grandmother," he laughed. "Wait a half an hour and I won't look so bad—it's the change since you saw me—that's what's got on your nerves. I've been this way for two months and I am not dead yet."

"But, Tom, I wanted you to go to Battle Creek, Michigan, for a couple of days and marry me."

"Marry you!" The man stared vacantly at her.

"Yes, marry me under another name." He sank back and closed his eyes. "It's a game, Tom, a game for big stakes, and I wanted you to help me play it."

"Go on!"

"But, Tom, you are not fit for the part, so we had best say no more about it."

"Oh, yes I am. You know, Flora, I teased you for years to marry me, until I saw my finish, and I'll do it now. Why, I'd do it if it had to be done in the name of Old Harry himself."

"I haven't forgotten, Tom; no, I haven't, and I'll tell you now what I never would before. All these years I've loved a man, and just the other day I discovered that he did not care for me. So, you see, Tom, we two have a lot in common." She laughed bitterly.

"I know the fool, Flora—but name the day."

"The day will be some time this next week.

"Who am I to be during the ceremony?"

"H. J. Holdon."

"Holdon? Holdon?" He looked at her with startled eyes. "Not the millionaire iron man?"

"Yes, Tom, the millionaire."

"The devil!"

"No, the millionaire, Tom; they have played with me for the last time, from here on; I am dangerous to any man who comes within reach of me."

"And here's wishing you good luck," were Tom's parting words when the plot had been fully discussed.

On Monday morning, he received a short note at the hands of Mamie, containing two crisp bills and a late photo of the Hon. Horace Holdon. This was the purport of the note:

"Dear Tom—I'm sending enough stuff along to tog you out like the original 'Iron Angel.' You are so near his size and both of you having an equal amount of hair, the only thing necessary to your makeup is that you get yours colored to match enclosed sample. Now don't be jealous; you will be a ringer and go under the wire lengths ahead. As soon as you are fixed up, hike. Get into that quiet little hotel and wait for Mamie. When she arrives, you can get busy. I am glad you're feeling better. Fly."

The morning after his arrival in Battle Creek, Mitchell received this letter:

"Dear Tom—Everything is working out fine; I will send Mamie to you to-morrow with more dough. Get the license, and if there is any kick on the part of the clerk about keeping the report back, put up all the money he wants. The thing must be on the quiet; don't do a thing unless you can

'fix' the clerk. Then go to a minister. Pick out some poor man who is doing his best to be a Christian on five hundred dollars a year. The years you put in on the stage ought to help you through the 'con' we fixed up. Don't try to bribe him; put up a strong story and offer him one hundred dollars. Tell him we have more money than we know what to do with. I'll depend on you to clinch the first preacher you tackle. It will be highly dangerous to have one square man with our story in his possession take to leaking.

"Fly."

The task of marrying a millionaire without his knowledge might have halted a woman less resourceful than Flora Boyd, but when the Hon. Horace Holdon stepped out of the hotel bus and was followed by a splendidly gowned lady, when they with other new arrivals, went to the desk and the gentlemen gave way until she had registered as Flora Marie Wieboldt and had been assigned a room; when she saw the magnate crowd up at her elbow, and put his great, sprawly signature on the line below her autograph; when she heard him ask the clerk to assign him to the room next to that assigned her, when she saw how closely the clerk observed her; she felt sure there would be no hitch in the proceedings.

She went to her room and had hardly finished her toilet, when the magnate was at her door. There followed three days of unalloyed pleasure for the magnate. When he was not busy closing up his business affairs, he was being entertained by a bewitching woman. And the aforementioned bewitching woman allowed a number of the good citizens of Battle Creek to surmise that the visiting millionaire was a good friend of hers.

The wedding of a spurious millionaire and Flora Marie Wiebold was attended by Mamie and the minister's wife as witnesses, while the genuine millionaire sat in a closed carriage at a point in one of the parks where Fly had promised to meet him for a last drive before going home. The minister had reserved his decision as to withholding his report of the marriage until he saw the bride. When he saw her and she had whispered that her people had been opposed to the match, that she loved Mr. Holdon and her plea of secrecy was made that he might be protected from the annoyance of full-page stories in the Sunday papers would cause him, the

good man softened. If the minister would only grant their request, they would be in Europe before their respective families learned the truth. It would save them much trouble. Wouldn't he do it?"

Then the prospective groom took a hand.

"I was opposed to a secret marriage at first," he confided to the minister, "but since Miss Wieboldt insisted so strongly against publicity, I have concluded that there may be a good deal said in defense of the thing. For instance, before going to Europe I have a great deal of business to look after, and naturally I don't want to be annoyed with the worse than senseless drivel one's friends insist on dispensing upon an occasion of this sort. Then, too, it would seem that the law ought to be satisfied when people of our age marry if we go before the proper officer, then go about our business without a flourish of trumpets and an invitation to the newspaper people to write us up and lie about us in an unwholesome manner."

The minister surrendered, the marriage ceremony was read, the proper responses made, and Mamie returned to the city immediately, carrying with her the marriage certificate, duly attested by at least two reputable people, while the spurious Mr. and Mrs. Holdon hurried to the park where the Honorable Horace Holdon, all impatience, awaited the appearance of the bride.

As Fly alighted from the carriage, Tom whispered, "I hate to give you up, girl—I hate it like sin—but here's hoping you pull his leg for a million."

The answer he received came back on the breeze, as laughing, Fly hastened away to meet the man of millions.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JOEL'S PLANS.

As Joel went out of his father's office a few mornings after agreeing to take a position at the mine, he chanced to see Mickey Dougherty limping across the street. At the time he only thought that the cripple didn't amount to much and wondered how long his father would keep him on the pay roll. Later, when he began to plan for his little campaign with Estella, Mickey came back into his thoughts and gradually took an assigned place in the maturing plan. From the day of her surrender Estella had been pleading to be taken away from Madame's. She would go anywhere and remain out of sight, if only she might escape the memory, ever recurring, of her first hours in the gilded cage. Besides, the whole establishment and everything in it, save one poor, disfigured, little mortal, had become hateful to her. She knew she had paid an awful price for one man's love; but he was such a persistent lover and the picture he painted of a care-free existence out in some quiet little cottage, near to his place of employment, had so filled the perspective of her vision that Madame's boarders' coarse jests and open sneers were lost upon her.

The senior Mr. Holdon's announcement that he proposed to get away from business cares for a year and that he had fixed the time for his departure materially changed Joel's plans for the future. He decided at once to ask his father for a lump sum above his ordinary allowance, on the plea that he might see his way to a profitable investment while his father was away. This appeal was favorably received and instantly met. Joel was fully equipped to carry out his changed program, which had taken shape even as his father was outlining his own plan for the rest period.

"Beatrice is so bent upon continuing her work in

the slums," he observed to Joel over their cigars, "that she insists upon keeping the house open."

"She's a fool!" the brother answered. "Not as bad as that, Joel," the father quietly interposed. "I take it that she owes this devotion to charity to her mother. Of course it is a foolish notion and I don't like it, but you know how determined she is. I had thought of asking you to live here——"

"Not for mine," Joel declared.

The magnate went on as though he had not heard the declaration. "But since you are to get settled down to something, and with a man who knows every kink in the game, I have had to look up some one else, and this time I found a poor relative who can be used to advantage."

"Well, that's good, better get all you can out of 'em before you die. They'll all be on top of us for a slice of the swag before you're cold."

Joel threw his cigar away and began rolling a cigarette. The father frowned across the table, but Joel met his angry gaze without a tremor. "Who's the chaperon?" he inquired, drawing a match across the gold case from which he had extracted it.

"Sister Nell Bishop has just written Beatrice that she will be pleased to keep house for her."

"Not that old fire-eater? Why, dad, the house will be overrun with woman suffragists and long-haired geezers who believe in straight-jackets for such gents as you and I. I can see Charley Wetherby's finish if Aunt Nell ever sticks her probe into him."

"I don't look at it in quite that light," the father hastened to explain. "You see Beatrice has never been in close touch with any of the people who make a parade of their love for the poor. When Aunt Nell was here last Beatrice was but a child, and mother was the receptacle into which Nell poured her woes. Now, I have an idea that if we give Beatrice about six months of Aunt Nell, and a taste of close acquaintanceship with short-haired women, she will have enough of the whole tribe and will be writing me to hurry home, so we may get back to a sane way of living."

"There may be something in it. Yep—guess your head is as level on this as on biz, good-by."

Horace Holdon sat at the library table long after Joel had gone. He had arranged his business affairs satisfactorily. Price was fully instructed as to the part he was to play in disposing of Charley Harris and his invention. Nothing stood in the way of the Honorable Horace Holdon's contemplated vacation. Fly Boyd, the woman who had been able to stir his blood, as his wife had never done, was willing to visit the Island Continent and Europe with him. As he sat there, thinking of her—the physical expression of perfect womanhood—he marveled at his passion for her. He reasoned that he could feed it to death and return to business at the end of the year without having a vision of her before his eyes, and a hungry longing for her presence eating at his heart every hour of the day. It had been that way with all the men he had read or heard of. They had been mad for a time, then when passion had full satisfaction, the madness had passed. As he mulled over the several cases with which he was more or less familiar, a troubled look settled on his face. In not all of the cases in review had the woman been willing to release the man. Scandal, murder, even suicide had followed. The magnate sat thinking—yes, he would give it up. It was folly; what would Beatrice think should there be trouble in the end? He would go to Flora (as he called her) and tell her that his business demanded that he give it his full attention. No, he would not. To get out of town without seeing her—that would be the better plan. But, why not have this one fling? The glorious presence of the woman, her hands, her wonderful hands, her eyes looking into his, her lips telling him he was the peer of any man she had ever met. He went to the mirror, stretched himself to his full height and was not disappointed as he gazed upon the well-made, well-kept man the mirror reflected. He would go on with it.

"You here, father?"

Beatrice entered the library and threw her arms around her father's neck.

"I am so glad you are going to have a good time, daddy, so glad, and besides, I want to thank you for suggesting Aunt Nell as my chaperon while you are away. And, daddy, I won't be horrid again if you

offer me money for my charities. I am glad, too, that Joel is going to do something, though I would have been better satisfied if he could have stayed with us. And, daddy, you must be a good boy while you are away on the other side of the world and write me just lots and lots of letters."

"Yes, yes," the father promised, as Beatrice patted his hair and picked a speck from his coat.

On the way downtown, Joel congratulated himself upon having a father who would conveniently remove himself from his little theater of action at the right time.

"I wonder if Mickey wouldn't be just about the best person to leave with Estella when we get settled. He has always been a tight-mouthed chap as far as I know him, and he's ugly enough and small enough to be trusted with a woman, if I can only get him to keep his mouth shut. I've got to have some one, and any sort of a woman is out of the question. They would blab. Yes, I'll just have to carry Mickey away for a few months. I wonder what the governor pays him."

At the Eagle Club he swung off the car and entered the club rooms. Two straight whiskies found lodgment within his interior before he went up to his rooms. With a cigar between his teeth, in his lounging coat, he puffed the fragrant smoke ceilingward and finished his plan.

"Gad, I believe Estella loves me. She isn't satisfied unless I'm with her all the time. Lord, but I was the lucky dog to get her when I did. And now when I go out to our country nest, my love bird will come plump, plump down stairs and just fall into my arms, with two big kisses and a squeeze for me. 'Now, Jim,'—isn't that rich? And to think there is a Johnson hitched onto the end of it. Ha, ha! What won't a man do for love of woman? 'Now, Jim, you naughty boy, don't you know it grieves me to have you away from me down in that wicked city?' Yep, wicked city; that's the way she puts it. I wonder who'll be her Jim by this time next year?"

For a little time Joel sat staring straight ahead, then, shrugging his shoulders, got up, went to the sideboard and poured a glass of brandy.

"No, I don't love her, it's just her baby ways that get me. By the time they are gone it will be time for me to marry some one. Let's see; I guess I'll not tell her a different story; I'm in the lumber trade to her and to all the folks I have to meet in the town I take her to. Why wouldn't Michigan City do for our home; it's far enough away from her folks and close enough to Chicago for me. Yes, I'm in the lumber trade and my cards will read, 'Mr. Jas. Y. Johnson, Portland, Oregon.' That puts my home address far enough away so that should she ever take a notion to make trouble for me, she'll have a nice, long trip and an interesting hunt for my people. The next move is to square Mickey with the game and take him along to help get things in shape in Michigan City.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AGITATORS IN THE PLANT.

Harris had been gone four days and Mickey one, when Price went to Moran to inquire if he had any word from Harris.

"No, sir, and the cripple hasn't showed up this morning."

"Well, as he's the only one who knows about Harris' whereabouts, I wish you would get his address from the boy when he comes."

Moran, who had made application for membership in the moulder's union the night before, passed a wink to Carson, the big moulder, as much as to say, they'd keep Harris' address in their own hands until they landed him in the union.

In the office, Hon. Horace Holdon was giving his attention to the various bits of information and instruction he still felt it necessary to impart to his man Price, before he started on his vacation.

"Well, Price, before I leave, I would like to know just how far you have gotten in your negotiations with young Harris."

He lit a cigar, and as Price wasn't hurrying with an answer, he went on: "I wrote our congressman a month ago, asking him to have a good, reliable lawyer investigate the matter thoroughly. He reports that there isn't a thing, either in the Patent Office or in the hands of any of the patent attorneys he could reach, that touches that machine of Harris'. So, you see, we have every incentive to push this matter to a successful issue. Don't haggle with him; agree to anything he asks, but push the thing through and be sure to get duplicates of all his drawings. You know the steps to be taken when you have the whole thing in your hands. Now, how far have you gotten with him?'

Mr. Holdon leaned back in anticipation of a favorable report.

"You know I only got at him last week, Mr. Holdon, and I'm taking it slowly. You see, it's a rather delicate business, and I want to be sure——"

"Yes, yes, that's all right, Price, but we want to make headway. I'd hurry the thing along as fast as possible. When I get back next year, I expect to be in a position, with that machine, to wipe out all competition on small casting. We've got the big business now and that machine will give us the rest of it. We must have it, so don't make any mistakes in handling your end of it."

"Trust me for that. I anticipate but little difficulty in landing Harris."

With a grunt of satisfaction, the magnate took up another matter in which we are interested.

"Here's a letter," he said, turning with the document in his hand, "from the Corporations' Protective. They have the required membership of one hundred over subscribed, and are prepared to furnish union moulders, machinists, or other mechanics, or men who will join those unions, on short notice."

"That's something like," the superintendent exclaimed, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, and I would advise you to get three men from them, a moulder, a machinist, and a general utility man, should there be a symptom of trouble in the shops."

"I will if it's necessary, but the men seem quiet enough these days and I don't anticipate trouble. I did, you know, when I suggested that you go into this Corporations' Protective Association, but I guess the conservative element is on top now."

"That's good. Do you think of anything else, Price?" He asked the question with his eyes on the clock.

"N—o, I guess we have everything well in hand."

In the shops, word was passed from man to man, that Holdon had left the plant in charge of "Stinker" Price. To a handful of picked men, word was passed that three foremen, Moran on the casting floor, Weeks in the tool room and Yancey of the machinists had agreed to stand by the unions and would make room in

their departments for men who were competent organizers.

About a month after Holdon's departure, John Bulman happened into the machinists' headquarters just as the secretary received word that Yancey had come across and an organizer could be used in the great Holdon Shops.

Turning to John, he asked, "What are you doing, Bulman?"

"Doing time," John laughed. "Doing time in God's great world-prison, and unless I quit pretty soon, my jailer will refuse to give me even bread and water, unless I beg for it."

"More of your confounded Socialism," the secretary snapped.

"Why, no, that's nothing but gospel truth, trimmed up to take the raw edge off."

"Well, I was thinking of giving you an organizer's job, but, Bulman, you would have to cut out your political work while handling this job, for it is delicate in the extreme and a misstep might prevent us from getting old Holdon where we want him."

"Holdon? Not the Holdon company?"

"Yes, the Holdon company, and if we are able to carry out our plans we'll force the plant into a closed shop agreement." John whistled.

"Say, Barnes, is that where you wanted to put me?"

"Yes. Yancey, you know him; well, he's with us."

"Yancey? By the eternals, Barnes, he's the strongest man in that shop. I want to congratulate you; why, he's got a head on his shoulders; I'll take the job under Old Man Yancey. You need not be afraid."

"All right," the secretary broke in. "How much of an advance do you want?"

John blushed as he thought Barnes had divined how hard up he really was. How he had been stretching his credit from week to week, and wondering each day when the butcher, baker, grocer, and landlord would begin to suspect that his cheery smile and hearty greeting were really counterfeit.

"Well, Barnes, I could use any amount, but you see when I get on the pay roll, I won't need help from the office."

"The job will pay you five dollars per day and expenses," Barnes announced, handing John twenty-five dollars and pushing a voucher out for his signature.

"And Old Man Yancey came over. Won't he be surprised when I present myself for the position? It's just six years since he left the Nixon company and went over to Holdon's. How he used to curse the unions and call me an anarchist. Won't he be surprised?"

John visited his grocer and butcher on the way home and informed them, as he made a payment on account, that he had the promise of a good job and would soon be able to square up. At home, he met his wife at the door.

"Sweetheart, we are going to live on Easy street," he announced.

"Get a job, father?" The question came from Rob's room.

John released his wife, who sat down smiling through her tears, and rushed into the boy's room.

"Sure thing, son."

"Isn't that fine?" The boy looked up and laughed.

"But, not a word to our good angel," the father warned, with a shaking finger, as he went back to the kitchen.

John went to Yancey's home that night.

"Well, of all men! John, I've thought of you a thousand times." Yancey was holding one of John's hands in both of his and shaking it, too. "Do you remember what a fool I used to be, Bulman?"

John laughingly answered, "We all take a turn at it, Yancey."

"Yes, yes, yes," the host laughed, as he led John back to the sitting rom and introduced his wife and daughter.

For a time, they talked of the men they had known at Nixon's, then John broached the subject of Holdon's departure and inquired if everything was quiet at the works. Yancey answered in the affirmative, and getting up suggested that it was time they were going or they would be late. Outside he said:

"John, my wife doesn't know I've gone into this

business, and after the way I educated her I'm ashamed to tell her; and besides, I take it, you came from the union and we will need to know we are alone before we begin to talk business.

At Holdon's the morning after Bulman's visit with Yancey, three new men were put to work. Each one a representative of the organized workers in the department to which he had been assigned. For years, the foremen at Holdon's had had full control of the men under them, both hiring and discharging. When Moran found a man incompetent, he simply presented the worker with a time-slip and sent him to the office. Holdon had always insisted that he could get more work out of a foreman and the men under him in this way than he had ever been able to get when the foreman had to carry his grievances to the office. Price had always considered this a curtailment of the functions of the superintendent and Holdon was hardly out of the city when he began to plan a change. Had he acted immediately, three union workers would not have been hired and four men who bore the reputation of being "leakers" would still have held their jobs.

Price, having finally formulated his plans, sent word to five of his foremen to meet him in the office. Yancey was first to arrive and his surprise grew as, one after another, the men came in.

Price gave each a cheery "Good morning" as he entered. When all were seated, he faced them. "Gentlemen," he began, "you know of course that Mr. Holdon left me in sole charge of the business when he went to Europe. That being the case, you can understand that I am anxious to make the best possible showing; that is, I want the books to show a gain in both output and profits when Mr. Holdon returns."

The men looked at each other, but did not reply.

"I have determined to make an investigation of each department and, with your assistance, institute certain changes which I have long believed would benefit the ledger."

He eyed each man in turn before he proceeded.

"In the first place, I want closer co-operation with you gentlemen who are over the men. And it has occurred to me, as the initial measure in inaugurating my

plan, that it will be necessary for me to be as close to my working force as possible; consequently, from to-day you will send any complaint you may have against men in your several departments to the office, and if on investigation the complaint is sustained, I will either discharge or transfer the men to other departments."

"Mr. Price, I certainly shall have to——" Moran interrupted, when he caught a signal from Yancey, "have to insist—to insist that my complaints be acted upon at once, if I want to get rid of them," he finished lamely, while Price smiled.

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Moran," he agreed. "In the matter of hiring men, I believe the same rule should govern, consequently you will send men who apply, to the office with such recommendation as you see fit to give. I will assign them to the various departments.

Wilson, who had charge of the pattern-shop and all woodwork, got to his feet.

"Mr. Price, I want to ask you one question," he announced in a loud voice.

"A dozen," Price replied, and added, "I would advise that you lower your voice, Mr. Wilson; I am inclined to believe that none of us are deaf."

Wilson's face was red with anger, as he went on.

"The question I want to ask is this: Did Mr. Holdon authorize you to make this revolutionary change?"

"And I must insist, Mr. Wilson, "that your question is impertinent. What Mr. Holdon suggested or did not suggest is outside the question. I am in charge——"

Wilson interrupted in turn. "I object to any such change. I know my business. Having held my place for more years than you have been here months is my warrant."

"I am of the same mind." Miller, of the shipping-rooms announced shortly. While Price, giving all his time to these two insurgents, failed to note that the three union foremen had sent the signal to "lay low" down the line.

"Mr. Wilson and Mr. Miller seem to forget that even a foreman may be discharged for insubordination," Price announced.

And the insurgents gave it back to him.

"Consider that you have my resignation and act upon it at once," came from Wilson.

"Here, too, you want to get a good, bright office boy to handle my job," Miller announced and started for the door.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, this will never do." Yancey was on his feet and Miller stopped with his hand on the knob.

While Price leaned against his desk, rather shaken at this unexpected development of opposition to his plans.

"I am inclined to think we should yield to Mr. Price's suggestion," Yancey broke in. "He has told us his single purpose in suggesting these changes is to make a better showing. Now, if the whole business shows a betterment, this will be reflected, only in lesser degree, in the various departments." He paused, and facing Miller, gave him the broadest wink possible and Wilson caught it. "Now, I take it that Mr. Price is not going to harbor ill will toward any of us, even if we have not felt like giving up our control over the men."

"Not at all, gentlemen," Price hastened to assure them. "I want men who are able to defend their opinions. If Mr. Wilson and Mr. Miller will listen to my further reasons for desiring this change, I believe they will take the same view of the matter as Mr. Yancey."

The insurgents sat down and Price went on. "I take it for granted that each of you appreciates the present situation as regards organized labor. In this plant, there is but one department that may be said to be a closed shop and that is the pattern-shop. In all the other departments we have men who belong to the unions and those who do not. As far as I am concerned, I would agree that this policy continue, but I am satisfied that organized labor will not be as charitable. Some day, these labor skates, living upon a salary drawn from the wage of misguided workers, will be forced to make an effort to organize this plant.

It was to circumvent this very thing, to make it impossible for the unions to load us up with their membership, also to prevent some union sympathizing foreman—no reflection on any of you—from discharging safe men and taking on union men, which led me to de-

cide upon this change. In a word, I want to be prepared to meet any attempt on the part of the unions to gain a stronger foothold in this plant. And I want to suggest that if any of you have outspoken advocates of unionism in your departments, you get busy and find some grounds upon which we may discharge them, without stirring up the men too much. Now, gentlemen, if there is no further opposition"—he waited, looking at both Miller and Wilson—"we will consider the matter as settled." No one entering an objection, he continued, "I have also decided to change the present pay system, at least on a part of the work, and I have prepared these blanks. At present, we have entirely too much day labor, and I want you gentlemen to make a careful estimate on the work you have in charge, and fill out these blanks, showing the averages as indicated. Together with this, I desire that you should carefully go over your work and determine how much of it may be put on a piece-work basis. I will admit that the readjustment of a wage scale is always a delicate matter, but if we go about it carefully and make our reductions gradually we may be assured that the men will not cause trouble, especially as we have but few organized workers to deal with. When you turn in these reports, and I would like to have them by Saturday noon, we will be well along toward a practical application of my plan."

The men filed out.

"Drunk with power," Wilson commented.

"I'd like to see him cut wages in the pattern-shop," was Miller's grim comment.

Yancey, Moran and Brush, had occasion to visit each other that afternoon.

"I'm going to slash my non-union men to the core," Moran told Yancey.

"Say, Yancey," Brush whispered when the machinist called upon him, "I'm going to put three-fourths of my men on piece-work and set the price where they will have to hump to save themselves from a twenty per cent loss in wages."

Yancey laughed and went back to his department. He went to Bulman, and told him of the conference.

"You say you are all right with him? Then for

God's sake keep right. You may be the means of saving the whole works."

"I don't see how," said Yancey.

"I'll tell you. If you are in his confidence, go to him and suggest that he ought to have two or three good safe men who could get into the unions, so as to keep posted. If this company's already in the spy furnishing conspiracy against the workers, he'll give it away."

"But, Bulman, won't that fix my clock," Yancey demanded. "Suppose the spies get into the union, where do I get off?"

"Nixie, the first spies they send out here, will get their blocks knocked off before they ever see the union. We need the spies in our business. You know there are several men under you that you are afraid to trust. Well, the spy comes on and lines them up. We pass the word to all the men we can trust to lay low, and you and the spy and Price do business. In this department, we want our spy to be a man who is willing to join the union; be sure to get that kind. Then we'll get a line on the men and later initiate the spy and he'll never forget it as long as he lives."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MICKEY IN A NEW SETTING.

"Dey's somethin' rotten wrong in dis house; de Missus is a bein' flim-flammed. She ain't none of yer fly-up-the-creeks; she's a lady, an' by grab, I loves her."

The speaker, our old friend Mickey, brought his knuckles down upon the floor of the little back porch with such emphasis that the next moment he had them before his lips blowing for dear life.

"He's another stinker, James Y. Johnson is, th' dirty welcher. An' here's me as thought first off dat de girl was one of dem as changes deir names over night. But she ain't; she's jest de sweetest piece o' calico in de world, an' Joel Holdon, he lied like a dog first t' her an' den t' me."

"Mickey, Mickey, come here," a voice floated out from the kitchen.

"Listen t' dat, now, just like a bird." The cripple sprang to his feet. "Comin', Missus."

"Oh, Mickey, Mr. Johnson writes me from Chicago that he will be home to-morrow. He's just back from a trip west."

"Huh;" Mickey snorted, and the young woman paused, flushed, and looked at him steadily. Laying down the letter, she sat looking at him until he became restless under her steady gaze.

"Mickey," she began, "I have often caught you looking at me as though you were trying to make up your mind to either ask me a question or tell me something, which was it?" She smiled and Mickey, shuffling his feet, stammered an incomprehensible answer.

"Which was it, Mickey?" There was pleading in her voice; a pleading the great heart in him could not easily resist.

"Both ov 'em, Missus; both ov 'em." He looked

into her beautiful eyes; looked and was blinded; for, in the months he had served her as chore boy, a man's love had come to dwell with him, a poor misshaped bit of abused clay. "But, Missus, I don't dare t' ask youse nothin', an' I don't dare t' tell youse nothin'—least not, till yer man has gone away agin."

"Gone away again, Mickey! Gone away again! You must be joking. James is not going away again until after ———" She blushed. "Well, not for a long, long time."

"I hopes so, lady, God bless youse, I hopes so;" and Mickey hurried out.

For a time, Estella sat dreaming of the home-coming of her lord and master, planning her little campaign of endearments and the future she anticipated.

"Well, I declare," she exclaimed, running to the door. "I forgot that I wanted Mickey to go downtown for me. Mickey! Oh, Mickey!"

On the way downtown, Mickey's emotions well nigh choked him.

"Mr. Johnson, who's Mr. Johnson," he muttered. "Dat I passes me word t' th' welcher dat I don't never breathe his name t' no one—an' I done it afore I knowed w'at he wanted ov me. If I'd a-knowed w'at he was doin'—if I'd a-knowed. But, he ain't seed th' last of de deal—not by no manner ov means, he ain't." Mickey shook his fist at a telephone pole at that moment doing duty in his imagination as Mr. James Y. Johnson. "Youse jist try it on, Mr. Johnson—youse jist get gay an' go to a makin' her cry, an' carry on—youse jist try it!"

On the way back home he began to dig deeper into the relationship existing between his master and mistress.

"I'd give a purty t' know how he got her—why, she's a' angel. An' all th' time she talks jist like she's fixed fer life. I knows she thinks she's his wife, all regular, but it stands t' reason she ain't. Fer why, she thinks his name is Mr. Johnson, w'en I knows it's Joel Holdon; an' she thinks he's a workin' in a lumber biz somewheres, w'en he's jist gamblin', an' lushin', an' spendin' de old man's coin." As he came in sight of the little cottage, he looked up. "Dere she is, an' she's

a thinkin' Joel Holdon is a-comin' home t' stay. I wisht I hadn't never promised him nothin'."

After delivering his purchases into the hands of his mistress, he went to his room to think over the situation.

The next day, Estella, all a-flutter with excitement, sent Mickey down to meet the first train from the city, telling him Mr. Johnson would probably have more packages than he could conveniently carry. The train came and Mickey hurried home.

"I thought youse might be anxious," he told her, and went back to meet the next train. Four times, he made his round trip that day, and each time the mistress had shown deeper distress. "Ef he don't come, I'll go an' git him—he'll come w'en I whistles—I'll bet him dat," was his grim comment as he went back for the nine-twenty train.

Mr. Johnson swung down from a Pullman, spied Mickey, handed him a suitcase and parcel.

"Well, Mick, how's things up at the palace?"

"All O. K., captain, an' she's bin a waitin' fer youse all day. I made every darned train on de card; next time youse 'ud greatly oblige me by a-statin' w'at train yer a-goin' t' fetch up on, see?"

"And she's been looking for me all day? Well, I have been gone a long time." He turned square upon the cripple. "Say, Mick, think she smells a mouse?" Mickey did not answer as quickly as his master expected. "Hey, Mick, are you dreaming? Why don't you answer?"

"I didn't know any mouse was dead," was the answer, and it came in a muffled voice.

"Answer my question," Joel commanded.

"Well, no, captain, I don't reckon dere's anybody on dis here earth 'ud make her smell a mouse lest youse did it yerself."

"You haven't talked to her, told her anything?"

"No, captain."

"Has she had any visitors since I've been gone?"

Mickey set the suitcase down and laid the parcel on top of it, while Joel stood with his hands in his pockets, wondering.

"See here, Mr. Joel Holdon, I——"

"Shut up, you fool!" Joel had him by the collar.

"Let loose ov me, youse welcher!" Mickey exploded and began kicking and scratching for all he was worth.

Joel let loose and backed off.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" he asked the panting cripple.

"Nothin' ain't th' matter with me? Oh, no! I'm all right, all right." Mickey laughed wickedly. "Youse put yer han's on me agin an' see. I'll rip th' guzzlins out of youse, see ef I don't."

"Pick up those traps, you little devil, and come along. I'll settle with you to-morrow." Joel turned on his heel and went on towards the house.

Mickey came behind muttering—"Hires me t' work fer him an' makes me promise I won't never tell no one he's a liar an' a fraud. Now he wants me to spy on th' woman he's a-foolin' with—me as 'ud lay down in dis street an' let all de wagons in town run over me ef ut 'ud do her any good in de world. He's goin' t' settle with me to-morrow—no, no, I don't git 'canned'—not dis trip. Me wages goes up, an' I buys a gun an' learns to shoot it, too; an' as long's I'se actin' a lie every day an' am a helpin' t' spoil her life, why they can't be no more sin in lyin' t' him—an' I'm goin' t' do it, see ef I don't."

The next morning, Mickey was down in the kitchen kindling a fire, when Joel entered. He stood looking at the cripple for a long time.

"Say, youse have knowed me fer some time, ain't yer?" The cripple turned. Joel laughed.

"Well, Mick," said he. "You haven't forgotten our little misunderstanding of last night, I see. But, what the devil you got mad at is beyond me."

"I ain't mad," Mickey announced, and to drown the sound of the lie in his own ears, he created a great commotion among the stove lids.

During the commotion, Estella entered the room, her eyes red from weeping, and her pretty face showing evidence of having passed through a storm. Joel looked quickly from one to the other of these two persons he played with; but if he hoped to catch a covert look of mutual understanding or sympathy, he failed. Mickey with one swift look as Estella entered the door, read

enough to put him on his guard, and as soon as he could, he got out of the kitchen.

After breakfast, Joel called him and ordered the suitcase he had brought the night before, taken to the depot.

"Hike out with it, Mickey—I'll be down in time for the ten o'clock train." With that, he hurried back to the house.

"Well, I'll be literally chawed inter bits; an' he's goin' ter quit her to-day, after all she's been plannin' fer him—th' brute! Oh, Mickey, Mickey, ef youse was jist as big as Jim Jeffries, wouldn't youse take de low lived stinker by de back ov de neck and shake th' devil out ov him? Wouldn't youse?—well, I guess yes." He halted out of sight of the house, threw the suitcase on the pavement, kicked it up against the fence, sat upon it and took stock of the situation. "Now, he's goin' t' try t' shake her, dat's plain as a cop in a saloon, an' he can't no ways do it less he squares me—dat's more of it. Now, spose he tries t' square me—how much am I goin' t' touch him fer? But first, is he a-goin' t' square me? Yep, less he's lookin' fer about all kinds ov hell t' break loose—an' am I goin' t' stay squared—yep agin Mickey, till youse gits enough rocks t' take de missus back t' 'Chi.' when th' house falls down." Picking up the baggage, he trudged on and reached the depot just a few minutes before Joel entered. His face flushed and his voice hoarse.

"Hi, there, Mick," he sang out. "Bring that luggage over here."

When the cripple set the suitcase down at the side of the seat, Joel caught him by the arm.

"Sit down here, Mickey; I want to talk to you. Now see here, I want to have a thorough understanding with you. You remember, you promised me you would never tell any one anything about this little spree of mine." Mickey nodded. "You promised also, that you would not let Estella pump anything out of you." Another nod. "Well, have you kept your word?"

"Yes, siree. Kept it t' date, captain." He looked up squarely. "But, I'm goin' t' quit t'-day."

"The devil you are!"

"Yep, dis 's my last trip fer youse."

"What's the rip, Mickey?" Joel showed his uneasiness.

"De game isn't goin' to be jist as pleasant as picknickin' frum now on—an' th' wages is too small fer me t' listen t' a cryin' woman—an' stan' all th' pumpin' they's likely t' be 'fore youse git her palmed off onto some other guy."

"So that's it. Mickey, you gave me a bad turn last night; I thought you had gone over to the side of virtue, and was going to work for love"—the cripple winced and looked down—"instead of working for me and money."

"No danger ov me gittin' much out ov love, is dey, captain?" The bitterness in the face of the youth deceived Joel, who took it to mean that the lad's misfortune had made him immune.

"That's right, Mick, there is mighty little in it but trouble anyway. You're as well off—and now to business. I'll give you two dollars per day, and you are to look after things closely and keep me posted about how she acts. I won't see her again for a month, and by that time she ought to have sense enough to see what's up, and begin to talk sense. I want you to go to a second-hand man some day this week and sell all the furniture, everything, and I'll write her where to go. I left two hundred dollars up at the house in the first volume of Cooper's works; you take charge of it, and if you get her to move out of here quietly, I'll give you all you get out of the furniture and stuff up at the house. The two hundred dollars is to see you settled at the other end of the line."

Mickey was puzzled—his question showed it.

"What—what youse want t' move fer?"

"Well, Mick, since you are going to stand by me until I get out of this scrape, I'll tell you. Estella hasn't had any more sense than to get into trouble, and if we stay here, all the old cats in the neighborhood will know all she can tell them; and she told me last night that four or five of them were getting very friendly."

Mickey bit his lips until he almost cried out. The train whistled; Joel pulled out a card and scribbled an address upon it.

"Don't ever let her see that card—she's got a different address. When I get you moved, I'll give you an-

other name and you can get my letters without any danger of her getting next. Don't forget about the furniture. I'll write or wire her where you are to go."

Here the train pulled in and Joel climbed aboard.

"Well, w'at d' youse think ov dat, Mickey Dougherty? Th' cold-blooded sinner. He's goin' t' move her, an' as soon as she gits a friend dere we'll move agin, until she gits tired an' either kills herself 'r goes straight t' th' devil. An' I'm t' help de son-of-a-gun. But say, I'm goin' t' have de money t' help put a spoke in his wheel." Slowly he made his way home. "I'd drather be in de hot place with me feet in th' fire dan t' go an' have her ask me anything," he told himself as he halted at the gate.

Yesterday, he had stood at this same gate and listened to her sweet love song, sung for a man unworthy. He waited, pretending to be interested in the traffic of the street, lest she should chance to see him and suspect him of listening.

"She ain't singin' dis mornin', poor little bird," he whispered as he slammed the gate and whistled to let her know that he had arrived.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A HOBBY AND ITS RIDER.

"Oh, Mr. Bulman, I came all the way over here alone, just to see you, so you must be good and do what I ask." The speaker, Miss Holdon, came out of the sick boy's room to meet John as he came into the living room.

"Well, I declare!" John exclaimed, extending his hand. "How are you? Do you know, I've been wondering how your new hobby behaved. I was thinking of you as I came home, and mourned because the great cause loses your enthusiasm while you spend your efforts trying to break new hobbies to ride." His eyes narrowed to a mere slit, and his face took on a look, half banter, half protest. "Do you know what set me thinking of you?"

"No, I don't, and besides, you are real mean to call me a hobby jockey."

"Well, do you want to know?"

"Of course I do. Tell me."

"All right, Miss Holdon. It was a corps of the Salvation Army, marching with music and song, up and down a nasty, dirty, half-paved street. I stood and watched them quite a spell. The great majority of them believe in their work, are consistent, earnest and intense; but how much enthusiasm they are wasting! They bewail the effects of sin, when they might so easily reach down to grapple with the great primal cause of sin and suffering. I came along toward home, and from thinking of them I came to think of you and your work."

"And you think it useless?" she demanded, but without resentment.

"No, only a great waste suffered, that a mite of transient good may be accomplished."

"But surely, Mr. Bulman, you do not understand the

work I am doing now," she insisted, with a strong inflection on the "now."

"No?"

"I came here to-night to get you to assist me, at least to the extent of delivering one address before our new club."

"And because I call your work a hobby, you think I am going to disappoint you?" John laughed. "No, no, Miss Holdon, nothing in the world so delights a Socialist as to be able to put burs under the saddle on a hobby horse, then watch the animal throw the next one who mounts it."

"That's perfectly horrid of you," Beatrice pouted. Then, brightening, went on: "I challenge you to make your old Socialist burs stick this time—so there!"

"I've put my foot in it, haven't I, mother?" he inquired of his wife, who sat smiling.

"Trust Miss Holdon for that," she answered.

John, with a hearty laugh, turned his attention to their visitor.

"You've heard it said that a thorough Socialist never was known to refuse an opportunity to try the sticking qualities of his burs, have you not?"

"I've heard it said, and quite recently, that a Socialist never knew when he was worsted in an argument, because, because"—the girl seemed embarrassed, and John laughingly finished the statement for her. "Because his premise is impossible, his whole philosophy in the air, as it were."

"That's it, that's it!" she exclaimed, "but I don't believe half of it. You know there's lots of things upon which we agree."

"Yes, I know you're playing with fire, but we won't discuss that any more. When do I get my chance to try the burs on your hobby?" He was smiling at her as he asked the question.

"Two weeks from to-night, at my house," she replied.

"At your home? Why, is it possible that you are going to carry open rebellion against capitalism into your home?"

"Oh, Mr. Bulman, you always put things in such an extreme way," she protested.

"Yes," John answered, "there are two extremes. Your splendidly appointed home represents one, the social rebel you invite to enter its beautiful portals represents the other, and we cannot harmonize or fraternize."

"You might come under a flag of truce," the girl interposed, brightly.

"No, not in this fight, where no quarter is asked, and none is given. The struggle is to the death; the white flag never flies. I might add"—his tyes twinkled—"that stragglers between the lines mounted on hobbies that rock forward and back, back and forward, are apt to get hurt."

"Anyway, I promise you we shall not take you captive," the girl said, as she got up and gathered her wraps.

"All right, Miss Holdon, I'll carry the war into the enemy's country. At what time?" he asked, as she prepared to depart.

"At eight o'clock, and I must thank you in advance."

"No, save your thanks until after the battle."

"I wonder what she wants me to talk on," John murmured. "It's a good thing for us that there are only a few such women in the world, mother. If all of them were like her, their charity and love would disarm the fighters and reduce the mass of our women and children to beggary unless we could——"

"Why, John, how can you say such a thing?" the wife protested stoutly. "I am sure Miss Holdon is an angel. I wish all rich women were like her."

"There, there, mother, your answer is my justification."

"Your justification!" the wife repeated indignantly. "John Bulman, you never talk anything but riddles to me."

"And you have never guessed one of them in your whole life, have you, mother?" He took her by the shoulder, and shook her gently, lovingly, and stooped to kiss her.

"There, you goose, it's bed-time," she replied. John let her go, and as he did so a little cloud crossed his smiling face.

"Where in the world have you been, child?" Aunt Nell demanded, with a great show of interest, on Beatrice's return from Bulman's.

"Auntie, I went out to capture a lion, as you call them, for our next Ethical Study Club meeting, and I'm going to give them a really and truly surprise.

"Who is the lion?" The aunt eyed the radiant girl narrowly. "Who's your lion?" she asked again.

"Mr. Bulman, a Socialist, and a gentleman, but a man awfully radical in his views."

"Oh, radical, is he, and a Socialist? Now, my dear, if you would only listen." Two pretty hands went up, and Beatrice put her fingers in her ears.

"I won't listen, Auntie, not to one who says I can't have my lion, and give our club a real surprise."

"My dear, you may not listen now, but I warn you. I, too, undertook the fascinating game of playing with lions." She got up, and stood looking down at Beatrice. "There are lions and lions, my dear. Some are old, mangy and toothless, but still able to roar. You can get plenty of this sort. Each one will bring his own personal hobby, and ride it to exhaustion, and no one but the lion and his hobby need be the worse for the exhibition. But, Beatrice, these Socialist lions have both teeth and claws, and if I know them, they would as lief make a meal off the lion tamer as to partake of the meat she offers."

"Oh, Aunt, you are as radical as my lion. I do believe I shall have to arrange to keep you apart. The capitalist tigress and the Socialist lion might forget all but their teeth and claws. I shall certainly keep you apart," she called back over her shoulder as she went upstairs.

CHAPTER XL.

UPLIFT FORCES AT WORK.

The task Miss Holdon had set herself in the formation of the Ethical Study Club was by no means an easy one. As she labored to bring the "uplift" forces together for the study of ways and means looking toward the betterment of the wretched poor, a hundred obstacles were encountered. Mr. Wilmerding, salaried by the "United Charities," was willing, of course, to join the club, but he insisted emphatically in joining he hoped to be able to convince some of the more reasonable of the members that in the "United Charities" could be found the sum total of all the uplift virtues. He even went further, when he informed Miss Holdon that a great many well-meaning people were not only wasting energy and substance in the prosecution of their so-called individual charities, but were actually breeding paupers by reason of their indiscriminate giving. Beatrice took his application with a heavy heart and went to Miss Amos.

Miss Amos presided over the destinies of a social settlement, an oasis in a desert of poverty, filth and crime. To her treasury came a goodly amount of conscience money from the rich.

Miss Holdon's name had never appeared on her subscription lists; still, she listened patiently to Beatrice's heart-emptying. "Yes, she would join and be pleased to give the use of the Home Hall to the club when it had a special program." "But, my dear," she added, "there are so many of these organizations, and we never see anything of their undertakings manifest in concrete achievements." She surveyed the well-appointed room in which they sat. "Don't you think you might accomplish fully as much, my dear," she inquired blandly, "if you were to join with us, and concentrate your efforts here?"

Miss Holdon had Miss Amos' application when she left the settlement house, but her heart was heavier for it.

Mrs. Sandstrom was next on the list. This lady had set herself the task of solving the servant problem, and she found the work fully as strenuous as she could desire. With a beautifully appointed home and an abundance of money, she had succeeded in gathering a membership in her special uplift that invariably responded to her call when they were to be entertained at the Sandstrom mansion. About two weeks before Beatrice's visit she had executed a feat which in its inception had promised to be a brilliant success, but which in its denouement proved well that old adage, "The proof of the pudding," etc., etc. The membership had been invited and promised a treat, "The Servant Girl, from the Girl's Standpoint, by the Girls." This announcement, beautifully embossed on dainty souvenirs, was found under each plate at luncheon. At the same time, some five strange servant girls of all degrees of intelligence, temper and general condition were being regaled in the servants' quarters. Mrs. Sandstrom had hired them at a week's wages each to come to her home and give their side of the servant girl problem in short talks before the club.

Mrs. Sandstrom's houseservants, we might mention, were in open rebellion against that lady's method of uplift, and when she had informed them at the "family council," three days before, that she had hired five girls to talk before the club at its next meeting, a second council followed immediateely upon the adjournment of the first. This council proceeded to hope the hired speakers would be able to tell the uplifters a few things. Consequently, when the hired talent appeared they were greeted with a warmth that quite won their hearts. By the time they were to be called to the parlors they knew more, touching the shortcomings of a goodly number of the ladies above, than is good for a servant to know.

"Can I make a spiel?" Mary Morrisey, one of the hired orators, replied to a question from Mrs. Sandstrom's maid. "Can I? Say, haven't I been fighting their impudent brats, dodgin' their men with th' goo-goo eyes, an' makin' me demands for better wages in one

place, better rooms in another, an' better grub somewheres else, to say nothin' of me havin' to hold me own with a tonguey, sharp-nosed, snoopin' mistress. Can I make a spiel?"

Mary was pretty, plump and saucy. Every one concluded that she could make a "spiel," and at the close of her speech they elected her unanimously to the position of leading speaker. She accepted, laughing until the tears rolled down her rosy cheeks, and proceeded to arrange the program so that she might close the debate.

When the ladies and their servants (each had brought at least one candidate for uplift) were seated, Mrs. Sandstrom opened the exercises with a few minutes of gentle patronizing gabble, then took up the slip of paper Mary had handed her, and the fun began. At the close of the session the following comment might have been heard, as the ladies prepared to depart:

"Shocking!"

"Perfectly horrid!"

"Impudent things!"

"The idea of that red-faced thing insinuating that our husbands and children needed the first dose of uplift!"

"I really pitied Mrs. Sandstrom when that long-nosed one said, 'After she'd been in a certain place three days she got so nervous she couldn't sleep, from thinking her snooping mistress was peeking at her from the closet."

"And that chubby one who told about the man catching her and pulling her behind the door and kissing her. Did you see Nora Jackman color up? They say she caught her maid and Jackman doing that."

"Well, this is my last uplift meeting," another declared. "My maid gets her walking papers just as soon as I can find another. I know she told that big-mouthed, warty thing, with the loud voice, about my children—I know it!"

"And the last one!" another exclaimed, throwing up her hands. "The last one who summed up the evidence, as you might say."

"Yes; wasn't she a bold hussy?" a little woman in velvet interrupted. "Why, her language was something frightful, and the impudent way in which she pointed out our defects and defended the servants."

"About four such meetings as that," a thoughtful-looking woman observed, "and we wouldn't have any more servants. I'll keep mine in their places after this; the rest of you can uplift and solve all you want to."

"Mrs. Sandstrom asked me to offer her excuses; she has an attack of sick headache." Mrs. Sandstrom's smiling maid stood in the doorway. Her message was received in silence, but as soon as she disappeared the silence was broken to a purpose.

When Miss Holdon called at the Sandstrom home she was met at the door by the mistress of the house. "Yes, she would join the club; she still believed in her mission and would be glad to present her plan to the club. Mrs. Sandstrom recounted her side of the servant-girl problem for Miss Holdon's benefit, and again the club organizer felt depressed, as she took up her cross.

Miss Natalie Marble's name was next on the list. Miss Natalie had been a progressivist ever since her thirteenth year—that is, she had informed the world that she loved liberty and despised love. Liberty, she asserted, depended solely upon the attainment of one grand object; that secured, woman would immediately assume her rightful position in the world of affairs. Prostitution, child murder, unholy marriage, sweat shop labor, irreligion, everything of evil in the life of woman would be wiped away as soon as woman had the ballot, the sacred ballot! Miss Natalie was profuse in her greeting; was not Miss Holdon an heir to millions? Now, if she could only be won over to the great cause. Certainly, she would join the club, and hoped to be put on an early program for her lecture on "Woman, the Eternal Woman," a lecture prepared in the shadow of the sphinx.

"Of such, with a sprinkling of new thought, single tax, science and slum grubbers, Beatrice organized her club for the study of the world's ethics.

Into this assemblage of warring good folk, intent upon cleaning a little patch of earth of its weeds and smells, and righteously jealous of every other sort of muckraker in sight, our friend John Bulman is to be precipitated. How many of Aunt Nell's mangy, toothless, clawless, tame lions will he meet?

CHAPTER XLI.

THE ETHICAL STUDY CLUB.

It was a well-dressed, prosperous appearing assembly into which John Bulman was projected the night he visited for the first time at the home of the Hon. Horace Holdon.

The program was under way when John was announced. Beatrice hurried to meet him and the look and words of welcome she gave removed the last doubt he held, and he entered the great dining room determined to break a lance in the tourney.

A Mrs. Wilber, whose specialty was fallen women, had the floor, and the ear of at least a fourth of her audience. In a nicely modulated voice, she was telling them that "the problem of moral regeneration is in the hands of our virtuous womanhood—we must shame our erring sisters by the exalted attainments of our virtue. It were better to incur the anger and suffer the abuse some of our fallen sisters heap upon us than to let them go unrebuked into lower depths of vice and crime. The one great woman's work of the world to-day is centered in this effort of a few heroic souls to regenerate and finally save fallen women—all else is of little worth beside this task.

"Every woman who can spare the time should join with us in the 'Rescue Work,' visiting those awful haunts of iniquity, praying with the calloused inmates, and by our very presence shame the men into abandoning such resorts." Mrs. Wilber sat down to the soft, non-kid-splitting applause of the few.

Mrs. Sandstrom as chairman consulted her tablets and called upon Miss Tibbs. Miss Tibbs, young, vivacious, beautifully gowned, and pre-eminently conscious that she was about to prove her worth as an uplifter, blushingly made her bow to the audience.

"Fellow students," she began, "I am going to talk to

you mainly upon a subject far removed from the one I had in mind when I accepted an invitation to address this meeting. I am led to do this because it seems to me Mrs. Wilber has put entirely too much emphasis upon the importance of her work. I cannot agree with the statement that the greatest work before us is centered in uplifting fallen women. My conviction comes from experience. In working among the children of the needy poor I have met many women of the class mentioned, and I am satisfied that they, at least, were lost beyond redemption. To illustrate, I will recount a single incident. One morning last summer I induced a gentleman friend to accompany me on a visit to some families in whose children I had taken great interest. They lived in a tenement building and Charles"—she blushed and looked down—"the gentleman I mentioned, stood in the hall while I talked to a mother about the proper care of her children, when one of those wretched painted women in a kimono came through the hall—I had just stepped to the door when I saw her throw her arms around the gentleman's neck, and heard her say, "Charley, old sport, it's good to see you again. Looking for rooms?"

The speaker blushed to the roots of her hair, as men coughed and women smiled. But she was both innocent and brave, and went on with her story. "My escort actually looked scared, and as for me, I almost fainted at the very boldness of the woman. As soon as she saw me, she turned and ran down the hall laughing horridly. When we came away, he explained to me that all such women were alike and that the one we had met just made a guess as to his name. He was actually as nonplussed as myself. Now, do you wonder that I have come to believe women of that class beyond the power of either prayer or shame?"

She paused and let her big eyes travel slowly over the audience. The audience sat silent, offering a tribute to her innocence.

"We, who meet together as students of 'ethics' are agreed, I believe, that ethics and righteousness are interchangeable terms. Then, if 'ethical culture' is to be desired, it seems to me we should extend our efforts where the best basis upon which to build an ethical or right-

eous life is to be found. I take it, no one will dispute the statement that the child trained to some useful occupation, and at the same time given a right understanding of moral responsibilities, is the only basis from which to work, and upon which to build for right relations in mature life." With radiant face and hands clasped before her, Miss Tibbs hesitated a moment and for a second time took stock of her audience. "I wish, oh, how I wish," she exclaimed, "that you, each and all, could go with me into the homes of thousands upon thousands of our children and learn of the great need there is that they be rescued from the sordid struggle for bread. Little tots, who should not yet know the alphabet, have been forced to labor for bread. Babies, who should be lisping that sweetest of all baby prayers, 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' have become experts in profanity, and adepts in petty crime. Boys and girls, not ten years old, boast of depravity, look upon virtue as a lie, and laugh at the story of the cross. An army of children, bred without the pale of civilization, and yet bread-winners in a Christian city." Lifting appealing hands, with eyes suffused with tears, the girl cried out, "I want to do something to banish this curse from the lives of these little ones. Who will help me? Who will help them? I know that the majority of the fallen women and the majority of the unclean men, a majority of the paupers, a majority of the criminals, with whom society will have to deal fifteen years hence, are in the making to-day, in the homes of our wretched, overworked, ignorant, godless poor. This is the work that is worth while. Will you help me. Will you teach me?"

There may have been a kid split in the applause as Miss Tibbs sat down. At least, the men were most liberal in their efforts to show appreciation.

Mr. Matthews, a divinity student, connected with the social settlement, and an ardent admirer of Miss Amos, was called, and for ten minutes argued that the only thing necessary to the salvation of any community was the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, invested in brick, mortar, wood, steel, books, beds, pictures, kitchen utensils, wooden horses, swings, horizontal bars, tools, work benches, the love of Christ, a chas-

tened spirit, a forgiving heart, and enough "willing workers" to gather in the mothers and prospective mothers, and start them right. Capture the children and teach them self-reliance and the needful art of being able to produce five dollars' worth of wealth for a dollar in wages. This accomplished with the decent women and children, he opined that the job of regenerating the fallen manhood and ditto womanhood of a community would be an easy matter, and in conclusion said he: "The social conscience of the community, once fully awakened, all undesirable characters will be expelled," and he sat down.

The next number on the program was decidedly sensational. Miss Holdon had discovered a disciple of individualism in the body of a newly arrived Count, and had through a friend secured his attendance, also a promise that he would talk on the "Ethics of Individualism." The Count was introduced to a vacuum produced by the indrawing of breath, induced in all the ladies by the announcement that a real Count was to appear before them in the flesh.

Count Rousselin smiled indulgently upon his vassals, stammered, coughed, cleared his throat, blew his nose vehemently, and plunged into a discussion of "The Individual Versus Society." A few of the gems that dropped from his pale lips are here appended:

"Zis ting we call government, is it not an abomination? Ze lady, God bless her, has want for some fine silk gown. Ze continent alone, it produce ze silk, fit; ze modiste fit; ze gown to fit (rapturous applause), an' ze government, ze, oh ze abominable government, it charge tariffs, an' ze lady, she must pay. Me, I believe ze world—ze whole world, it should be free to woman, beautiful woman (more rapturous applause). For men, I believe in liberty—all government is slavery. To have government, some one must rule; if ze few rule, ze many must obey. Zose who must obey are slaves; is it not so? To ze extent zat zey obey, are zey not slaves? 'Count Rousselin,' zey say to me on ze continent, 'how can you, who own thousands of acres of lands, an' have hundreds of servants an' peasants who obey your lightest wish, how can you speak so like you do?' It is not what you Americans call an insincerity. An' I answer,

'I live to-day as other men force me to live, but, to-morrow will come. To-day, while my servant waits upon me—to-day, I teach my servant ze lesson of true liberty; individual liberty; an' to-morrow my servant will have grasp ze great truth an' liberty will be born.' 'But you must be an anarchist, Count,' zey say to me again; an' I answer, 'I am—I am, and only a very rich man can afford to teach an' to practice zat anarchy.' I laugh at zem, an' I laugh at your large-around and little-headed statesmen; an' I clasp hands wis your big-headed, lean an' hungry business men; zey who take an' hold; an' to-morrow take an' hold more of ze good zings, and laugh, an' buy, an' take, an' hold all zat zey want; an' still to-morrow zey want more an' take an' hold zat, too. I clasp hand wis zese big-headed, lean, an' hungry men; but I spit upon your men in politics, your government, where in service ze men grow big below ze—what you call it? Belt? Oh, yes, ze belt, an' infinitesimal in ze head; an' zat is government. An' always, it has been so. New governments are built by big-headed, lean, an' hungry, fighting men. Old governments go always into ze hands of fat, fatter, an' fattest bodies, wis little, small, smalles' heads. Zen, ze revolution comes; an' finally, out of all ze revolutions, individual liberty—it is to be born. 'Would you kill a man?' my friends have asked of me, an' I say to zem, 'Would you put pork in ze barrel or fish in ze tubs?" An' zey look foolish an' I say: ' 'Tis ze same to-day; you kill meat an' catch fish zat you may live. To-morrow, ze world will demand liberty—an' liberty, it is more zan life; so, too, will ze world kill meat an' put fish in tubs.' Is it not so? 'But, you are dangerous!' zey exclaim, making large zeir eyes at me, an' I answer: 'No, not so dangerous as a railway train is to zose who use it; not nearly so dangerous as ze machine, ze—ze—what you call hands, tends.' 'But, you would destroy society!' and zey try to look pained an' displease, so I reassure zem. 'I do not seek to destroy society; I but point out zat all government is slavery; all law is so much of fetters, an' so unnecessary to ze individual capable of understanding liberty. Would I destroy? No! Ze ignorant will destroy, an' ze wise, zey will watch ze destruction an' smile while ze ignorant

build again.' My servant may kill; my words may incite his anger; an' his ignorance of ze great law of change may cause him to anticipate ze law; but I—I am above ze law, an Individulist—for I need not to labor—I am free. Ze man, ze woman, all should be free. Zen will ze gods come down to earth again; zen, when laws are forgot, an' freedom is ours, zen will great men be born, an' ze world ethic, pure anarchy, ze essence of individual liberty, it will compass ze globe. Zen will ze folly of government be demonstrate an' ze count, your servant, be remember as is one John ze great Baptes."

The Count took his seat in a silence that was audible, and the chairman, looking frightened, made frantic signs of distress to Beatrice, who failed, however, to understand the signals.

CHAPTER XLII.

BULMAN TALKS ETHICS.

As recorded in the last chapter, Count Rousselin had but finished his dissertation on "Individual Liberty," when the chairman hoisted signals of distress, which Beatrice failed to comprehend.

The distress had its origin in the whispered question of a member, who had read John Bulman's name on the program and had advised that that number be omitted. As Bulman was to follow the Count, and was seen making his way toward the platform, she had no choice, so long as she could not get the ear of Miss Holdon, but to announce the speaker.

"Mr. John Bulman will now address you on 'A Socialist's View of Ethics,'" she announced in a low voice; then turned to the member who had suggested omitting the number and asked in a whisper, "Who is he?"

"One of those anarchists, Count Rousselin told us would some day blow us all up."

"Gracious, is that so?" the chairman gasped, then turned to survey the man who, at that moment, bowed to her and faced his audience.

"Friends, I have but a limited time in which to deal with a great subject; therefore, I hope that you will pardon me if I do not use a great number of words in thanking the Ethical Study Club for the courtesy extended a representative of the revolutionary movement of the world. But, I do thank you for this opportunity." The speaker paused a moment then plunged into his subject. "All about us, we have Ethics talked of, and talked of, yet how many of us would know an ethic if we met it at noon-day? What are ethics? What is ethical? If I can give you a short definition of ethics as I view the things you call ethical, we shall be the better able

to understand the basis upon which the conclusions I shall reach are founded."

"One speaker has said, in effect, that 'ethics and righteousness are identical terms,' and the great majority of us do look upon anything named ethical as being righteous. Yet, the Mormons taught that polygamy was ethical; so too do many religions espoused by millions and millions of people. Our Protestant and Catholic churches teach that it is unethical for the men and women of the common life to have more than one husband or wife, and any stepping aside from this ethical relationship is branded as criminal and is punishable by law. This looks good, is good; but, this 'ethic' is not all-conclusive. This being true of any ethic we may examine, the Socialist makes contention that the ethics of to-day are upon the same level as were the ethics of the tribe, the first governmental unit in the development of society above the dignity of the family.

"To revert to the sex ethic, which we have heard expounded at some length to-night. Is it not true that your churches grant to kings, princes, dukes, counts, and capitalists, immunity from the sex law? Who among you but knows that with but few exceptions the royal families of the world are rotten morally, yet they are all anointed of God? Dare you deny that the possession of wealth exalts the holder above this 'ethical law?' Should you deny it, I would cite you so many cases wherein your ethical reformers, Christian purists, God-serving officials and patriotic politicians, have taken the bribe offered in dollars and cents by the licentious and greedy pillars of society that you would hang your heads for shame. The very fact that prostitution exists in a Christian nation proves weakness on the part of the Christian majority, when it comes to dealing with an offense against the very root of all ethical relationships, the sanctity of the home. This abominable institution pays tribute direct to the city treasury in one place, through a system of fines in another, and by way of bribes and blackmail in a third; and these are all Christian cities. Prostitution could not exist for a single year in any land wherein one moral law was made to apply to all people. A land where an 'ethic' could not be twisted to suit the needs of an immoral, profit-taking

class, and an equally immoral, semi-criminal class of procurers, who for profit subsidize both church and state and ply their hellish traffic among the daughters of the working world.

"That is a strong statement. Your faces tell me it is too strong for you, and I do not wonder. You, who twiddle your thumbs and hatch resolutions for the uplifting of the sodden mass of disease and filth-cursed poor, are not used to anything stronger than an ethical tea, and that must be diluted and well sweetened and taken in sips. The meat of a revolutionary program, looking to the establishment of an economic base upon which a world-ethic may be builded—why, the very idea is repugnant! Please pass the sugar, Mr. Bulman."

Significant glances passed between the uplifters, and the speaker, apprehending them, said: "To invite a Socialist to talk on ethics is to ask him to direct his darts at the weakest spot in your nice, white-enameled armor. What is an ethic? What are ethics? You say an ethic is the last word of righteousness expressed in government. And I tell you flatly, an ethic is neither more nor less than an agreement between two or more persons as to the manner in which they shall treat each other in all matters covered by said agreement. This agreement, either accepted voluntarily or by compulsion, becomes a law, and all law is ethical to those who profit through its enactment and is likewise unethical to all who are despoiled by its enforcement. That this is the case, I shall prove even to your satisfaction.

"To-night, we have listened to a free man, one above the need of labor, who, with lands and hundreds of workers at his beck and call, may talk anarchy, the dreamy ideal of an individual liberty in operation outside the pales of an organized state; and his talk of revolutions, the killing of men as one kills animals for meat, or puts fish in tubs, will be listened to by the parlor gatherings of the world. and next day his hearers will vie with each other to wine and dine him. But, should any one of you hear a ragged devil on a street corner talking the same stuff about 'Individual Liberty,' you would hand him over to the police as a dangerous citizen—an undesirable citizen—and defend your act as ethical.

"I do not care to discuss individual liberty in the sense anarchists use that term; I only insist that the world of mankind passed from the age of individual liberty when man took upon himself the responsibilities of family life, and later, organizing into tribes, established laws and dubbed them ethical. From that time to this, as society has become more centralized, more complex, the individual has been forced to surrender, one after another, the liberties he enjoyed as a savage living without government; but for every 'liberty' surrendered, society has heaped upon the individual and his children a store of blessings, and the work of the social order in the reclamation of the individual is not finished; it is but begun.

"To talk of destroying government while man as yet has scarcely mastered the A B C of the alphabet of possible progress may be all well enough before a mob of ignorant and oppressed workers, or at an ethical function such as this, but among thinking men and women, such an argument can have but little weight in face of our knowledge of the needs, the duties, the powers of the social state for good, for progress.

"When the forebears of our present-day individualists forsook their lonely lairs in the forests of the young-old world and banded themselves together for mutual protection, I strongly suspect that they did not at once organize an 'Ethical Study Club.' Yet, in their organization ethics had birth, and have been handed down to us in the same form. Through all the religious experiences the world has had, strange though it may seem, the 'Ethic' has never changed. Instituted in that far distant time for the protection of property rights in life, service, and material wealth, running to the tribe first, then to the individual, we find that through all the vicissitudes of time the 'Ethic' has held its own. Let's examine it as it first appeared. In the tribe, it was 'Ethical' to protect the common property of the tribe; 'Ethical' to protect the life of a tribesman; 'Ethical' to surrender one's life for the life of the tribe; 'Ethical' to protect the private property of the tribesmen; 'Ethical' to protect the marriage relation; 'Ethical' to protect whatever form of sex-companionship had been found best adapted to the needs of the tribe, be it monogamy,

polyandry, or polygamy. All this was 'Ethical' at the birth of government, at the beginning of individual surrender. And, I can not see how you could quarrel with so splendid a system of ethical laws. Why protect the common property of the tribe? Why inculcate the wisdom of patriotism? Because they protect the common life and make ample provision for virtuous family relationship; they protect private property in the hands of the individual. Now, what more could one demand, even at this day, in the name of 'Ethics?'

"But let us investigate this seemingly ethical, righteous relationship. Within the tribe, this works for the strengthening of the bond that unites the individual members, for the 'Ethics' of those days might not be denied without loss of property, banishment, or even death, as the penalty imposed upon the 'unethical' tribesman. It does look good. But, suppose we go with the warriors of this tribe to-night on march round the base of yonder mountain. Beyond the mountains, our chieftain tells us there dwells a people rich in tanned skins, bows and arrows, horses and cattle, and other of this world's goods, all of which, besides the comely damsels of the tribe, may be ours for the taking. Let us go on march to-night. To-morrow morning, we shall fall upon this people; a people whose only offense against us is that they have something we want. We shall butcher the men of the tribe, confiscate all the property we can move, and take the women of the tribe captive. Now let us return to our side of the mountain loaded with spoils, to meet the women and children, the old men and the halt. What sort of reception will we receive? Will our wives storm at us: 'Away with these strange women; return them to their families; this conduct is 'unethical?'

"Will the old men who helped shape the laws that protect tribal and private property cry out: 'You have disgraced us! disgraced us! Return at once to the people you have robbed all the loot, all the women! You are unethical.'

"Will the tribe's 'ethical study club' resolve regarding immorality, because we broke up a hundred homes and consigned the wives and maidens of the tribe we destroyed to an immoral life? Will any one of these

things happen? How will you know that none of them may happen. The uplifters, the old men, the women of our tribe, all will acclaim us heroes; receive us with open arms and kindle fires to the Great Spirit in thanksgiving for a victory—and this, too, is 'ethical.'

"So, in the final analysis, it is just as 'ethical' to murder men your government wants killed as it is to save the lives of those the government needs to protect it against an equally ethical foe.

"It is 'ethical' to protect the private property of the individual members of your organization, be it a business association, state, or nation; and equally as 'ethical' to confiscate the private property of any man who is not of your 'tribe.'

"It is 'ethical' to resolve on virtue at home, talk sanctity of the family, and enact laws for the guidance of your own household; and it is equally 'ethical' to destroy this relationship wherever you find opportunity outside the little 'ethical' circle you have drawn about yourself.

"I contend that your 'ethics' to-day are but the ethics of the jungle, the law of tooth and claw, half hidden under the thin, white enamel of a spineless Christianity. The only 'ethic' you know, the only one the world has known since the days when Christ attempted the founding of a 'world-ethic,' has been made to fit 'property rights' in labor, and the products of labor. As a Socialist, I contend that the human family will not be lifted out of the degradation of ignorant sinning against the fixed laws of life until society shall give to the weakest individual among us the protection of its strong arm—shall institute a world democracy and take up the task of deodorizing present day 'ethics.'

"Some of you seem dissatisfied"—the speaker paused—"but, if I give you concrete examples of the operation of 'ethics' in business, in religion, in politics, and in labor circles, and prove to you that present day 'ethics' are dictated and dominated by property interests, and not by that altruism which alone is capable of lifting man above the sordid grind of the material world, I shall feel that my effort has not been in vain.

"The Socialist maintains that a class-struggle exists in the social order; in a word, that there are two mighty

factors in the modern state which make for revolution. The capitalist class exploiting the material world of its wealth, through the ownership of the machinery of production and the power that ownership gives over the workers, and over against it the sweating millions.

"The exploiting, capitalist class has need for a large retinue of go-betweens, politicians, teachers, bribe handlers, labor misleaders, and flunkies in general.

"Holding first place in all councils of state and church, and by reason of its wealth always arbiter of social activities, it is but natural that all who are ambitious for such distinction as society may give should both ape and envy our dollar-damned leaders.

"This being the case, the great majority of our professional, business, and legitimatized-gambling families, together with their retinue of little parasites, give tongue to the cry raised by their masters, when the Socialist condemns the class division in society and seeks to destroy it through the introduction of an industrial democracy.

"On labor's side of this shifting class line, you will observe a few men of wealth, an army of professors, not a few writers, and a great body of students, all of whom are willing to go down into the old melting-pot of democracy along with the workers, in order that they may be the better able to reach the exploited class with the program offered by the social democracy. Along with these recruits from the class above, come the class-conscious workers who accept the philosophy of Socialism as their demand. Below them stand the great mass of the exploited, unreasoning labor world. And out of this great army of labor, every man and woman who lives upon the other side of the class line must draw food, clothing, shelter and all the luxuries they enjoy. The product of the producers being limited, it follows that the more the exploiting class draws from the wealth produced from the land, in mine, mill, or factory, the less the producer may have for his own needs. And your ethical laws are so fixed that the idle class and its hangers-on may revel in the plunder taken out of the worker's life, while his family suffers the keen pangs of a hundred hungers—and it is 'ethical.'

"In order to better exploit the producers of wealth,

our capitalists institute boards of trade, through which to rob the farmer—and this is 'ethical.' To control their employes in our industrial centers, they establish spy systems, hire men to join unions, and, for a few dollars, become the abettors of perjury—and this is 'ethical.'

"When your captain of industry wants to destroy a rival in business, or violate the laws of the land, he lays his scheme for escaping the law before his legal adviser, and that gentleman proceeds to 'fix it'—and that, too, is 'ethical.'

"When one of our great business men is caught with his hands deep in the pockets of the people, a man who has sworn to uphold the law, an attorney, if you please, appears for his client and all the machinery of evasion, subterfuge, technicality, and chicanery is put in motion to defeat the law—and this is 'ethical.'

"Your lawyers have perverted every ethic law is based upon, wherever and whenever wealth has been cited before the bar; but they, and the bench as well, make up for this laxity when the poor, half-maddened victim of your class-ethic is brought to bar. Away with him! If he has stolen a ham to feed a starving child, send him to the penitentiary. Let the majesty of the law be vindicated! Had he only stolen a railroad or some thousands of acres of land, he could have had a mistrial, and at the next election he might go to congress—and this is 'ethical.'

"Your M. D.'s have fought for hundreds of years to compel suffering humanity to accept horse medicine, divers poisons, a squirt-gun and a lancet, as the only implements and remedies fit to minister to suffering flesh. In every legislature, in every state, they have lied, lobbied, and bribed, and bulldozed every other school of practice. Every individual doctor standing for progress has been sandbagged by the Doctors' Slugging Committee. Mark them down, homeopathic, eclectic, osteopathic, biochemic; all these schools of progressive treatment have suffered at the hands of these saw-bones—and this is 'ethical.'

"Your manufacturers organize a union, elect a slugging committee and go out after members, with the plea that they must organize to keep labor from organ-

izing, and to break up those labor organizations already established; and this, too, is 'ethical.'

"Your business men organize a Merchants' Association and send out a committee to solicit members. They send their families to church, while their 'Price Making Committee' meets to fix prices for the next week. How much any member may pay for produce, how much he shall charge for his wares, is fixed, and woe to the business man who will not join this most 'ethical' association.

"But of all the organizations in this day of organized 'ethics,' the lawyers' Bar Association takes preëminence as the most unethical, most venal, unprincipled, lawless aggregation of them all. To hear a bunch of its highlights—each of them an attorney for from one to a dozen piratical concerns—when they are met together to discuss "The Ethics of the Bar" must certainly cause the good Christian's very bad devil to laugh with glee; yet, I desire to assure you, this association is as 'ethical' as your ministerial association or the patent poison advertising religious press of this day.

"The last 'ethical' organization on the side of capitalism to which I desire to call attention to-night is that of our worthy bankers. Able assistants are they to our gambling fraternity, the right-hand men of the speculators who filch their winnings largely from the decaying middle class.

"The bankers spend your money liberally in the hope of winning a fortune, and when they have lost your savings, you are blandly admonished to keep your mouth shut for the good of the business world. They advocate the arbitrary abrogation of your banking laws when they get pinched; but they are over-anxious that the common herd shall obey the laws they have had passed for the protection of their very profitable business. Should one of them be convicted of violating the class laws their association has secured, you will discover that the violation was but technical; and should the banker be found to have forged notes for hundreds of thousands of dollars, learned gentlemen belonging to that eminently ethical association entrenched in our courts will argue the 'intent' of the act, and finally this farce in the name of 'ethics,' will end either in the banker becoming a

bookkeeper or clerk for a short term in our penitentiary, or he goes scot free through the application of a technicality—and it is 'ethical.' But we Socialists warn all poor mortals against forging commercial paper or memorandum notes, for the propertyless man will go on the rock pile for ten years if he tries to filch twenty-five dollars from a bank, and it won't make an iota of difference what his 'intent' may have been.

"Take all these organizations of the exploiting class and let us see what next they will do in the name of 'ethics.' Nothing more nor less than the formation of an association of Post-nuts scab worshipers, made up of delegates from the organizations I have mentioned. This alliance for the promulgation of patriotism is never known to flourish in a soil that has not first been plowed by organized labor. Its speakers are drawn from pulpit, platform, and the marts of trade. All swear that a man who joins a militant organization puts a collar of servitude about his neck. 'Freedom of Contract' is the very breath of social and business life, they shout at us. Yet, each one of these men is held by the 'ethics' of the association to which he belongs in just that sort of servitude. The free man, a scab, we are told, is the noblest work of God, the best citizen, the highest exponent of a perfect patriotism, and all the goo-goos, me-toos, reformers, and delegates, cry 'amen, amen.'

"Just across the line that divides the workaday world from this most savory gathering of the elect, a labor agitator and a Socialist gets busy. He tells the workers that organization will give them power to shorten the work day and increase wages, that they may have more of leisure and more of comfort in their homes if they will organize for mutual protection, as have the politicians, capitalists, manufacturers, merchants, lawyers, doctors, and preachers.

"Then, going a step farther, the agitator insists that the producers of the world's wealth may adequately protect their product when they understand the power they may wield through the ballot, and at once, and from every quarter, our Parryized Scab Hunting Push sends up the cry: 'Away with the agitator! Crucify him! He is a disturber! An un-Christian, un-American, un-

patriotic disturber, who is stirring up discontent!' And at once every little lickspittle in the camp of the exploiters takes up the cry—and it's all 'ethical.'"

For many a day after, Bulman's rapid fire talk on ethics was discussed with bated breath at parlor gatherings throughout the city.

CHAPTER XLIII.

YANCEY PLAYS A PART.

"Mr. Yancey, I want to thank you for your timely suggestion when we had this plan under consideration."

This was the salutation with which the superintendent greeted the foreman when he had responded to a call to the office some weeks after the foremen had received their instructions.

"You're welcome to anything I can do to keep business moving," Yancey replied, seating himself.

"That's the spirit; that's the spirit." The superintendent was all enthusiasm. "And Mr. Yancey, do you know I am more than surprised at the comprehensive reports I have received from yourself, Moran and Brush? Why, I had not contemplated the possibility of making half the saving your reports suggest. I have been going over them one at a time. I had both the others in here, and they insist that the changes they suggest may be made without more than a grumble or two on the part of the men, and I have decided to order these changes, provided you are of the same mind regarding your department."

"Well, there's one phase of the situation that has struck me since I sent in my report, Mr. Price." Yancey looked squarely at the official. "I had not taken into consideration the union men in the shop. You see," he added hastily, "a cut in wages, or a change to the piece-system will give the union people the best argument in the world, and they will doubtless use it. Now, I would suggest that we ought to have a man in each department or at least in the more important ones, who, while nominally a union man, may be depended upon to report to us. I understand there are several companies who are prepared to furnish men."

"The very thing!" Price nodded vigorously. "And I see no reason why I should not tell you; of course,

you understand it is to go no farther. Our company is already a member of the Corporations' Protective Association, and we can get men here within a week if necessary." Price was in high feather. He felt that Yancey was to be of great service to him.

"I'm glad we are so well fixed to handle them. And when you send for a man for my department, don't forget that I want one who is not a union man, but wants to join. He will be able to do good work."

"When do you think we ought to have him here? They cost about one hundred per month besides the regular wages."

"Well, there is no immediate hurry. You say you can get them on a week's notice? I'll think it over and let you know. Anyway, I don't believe I will need my man for a couple of weeks."

When Yancey had returned to his work, Price called Moses Webster in, dismissed the office stenographer, and dictated the following letter:

Chicago, 19—

Corporations' Protective Association, Cleveland, Ohio:

Gentlemen—We were very much pleased to learn of the successful launching of your very worthy association, and may be hammering at your doors with a cry for "Help" in a short time. Please write us fully as to cost to us per week for three men, good mechanics; one a machinist, the other a moulder, the third to be named later; none of them union men, but all willing to join. You notice we are anxious to have our men organized. Let us hear from you fully, also, tell us just how long it will take to get the men to us after you receive wire from us for three. Yours cordially,

The Holdon Co.,
F. Price, Mgr.

There had never been such a harvest of applications in so short a time from one establishment for membership to trade unions as came out of the Holdon Co.'s plant within two weeks after Mr. Price had introduced the piece-work system and began cutting wages.

Yancey disliked his part in the battle more and more as the days went by, but as he thought of the infamous spy system he brought his jaws together over a tongue that often brought him near to trouble those days. Smiling grimly, he walked over to the office one morning and ordered three spies to be delivered within the

week. Manager Price sent for Moses at once and instructed him to send "for 3," as indicated in his letter of previous date.

Moses Webster, at the close of his labors that day, waited until Wilson came through the office building to leave his reports, and hastened out after him.

"Say, Wilson, I want to have a talk with you if you have time. How's things coming in the shop?" was his query as they fell into step.

Wilson eyed him keenly. "Are you talking from an office standpoint or on the basis of our long friendship?" he demanded.

"Well, Wilson, I don't know what to say to that;" he hesitated. "You see, it's this way—Holdon gave me an increase and then put me in a confidential position, and it was something I have learned in that capacity that has been causing me a world of uneasiness." He looked straight into the eyes of the old foreman. "George, I wish to God I was back on my sixteen dollar job. You know I have been calling myself a Christian —how serious the thing is growing, you will be able to guess when I tell you I must either quit my job or the church." His voice broke and the older man looked his astonishment. "I don't know what to do—we need—we must have money to live on and this is a poor time to go hunting a job."

"Moses," the foreman replied, "it's always a safe rule to do right, or at least, what your conscience tells you is right."

"If I'd done that, I'd been out of a job the day after I got my raise."

"Well, what in the name of time——"

Moses interrupted. "Will you promise never to tell a soul what I am going to tell you?"

"I don't want any secrets——"

"But, I want your advice," the young man protested. "I've known you since I first came here and I have always heard men say, 'George Wilson is a man to tie to.'"

"All right, Moses, fire away, but remember I may ask you to give my promise back." Moses paid no attention to this and plunged at once into his story.

"The Holdon Company is doing a dirty, despicably dirty thing, Wilson. And I am the one through whose hands all the correspondence passes. They are members of a great company, backed by over one hundred big employers of labor, who through this company hire men to join the unions; then make daily reports on all the men do or say in their meetings. They also keep track of the men on work, and this information is purchased at the price of perjury and is clearly a conspiracy against the men." Wilson's look of amazement halted the narrative.

"You, you don't mean to tell me that there is such a company?"

"Yes, and the Holdon Company holds five hundred dollars stock in it."

"And I thought that story was a Socialist lie," Wilson admitted in a low voice.

"Lie, nothing! I sent to them to-day for three spies; they will be here within a week. There, it's out and thank God; I feet better."

Wilson looked up blankly at the closing exclamation, slowly rubbed his stubby, gray beard and stood silent.

"What would you advise me to do?"

"Moses, you have knocked a couple of props from under me; consequently I am not just steady in my upper works, and—and I need time. You don't mean to say Mr. Holdon went into this thing?"

"Mr. Holdon dictated the letter accepting membership——"

"Well, I'll be —. Say, Moses, how long has it been going on?"

"Ever since they got afraid the men would organize."

"And Mr. Holdon did this?"

"Yes, Mr. Holdon."

"Give me time, Moses, give me time; the world wasn't made in a minute. I ain't going to give your story away; but I want to suppose a case with another man before I give you an answer. You see, the men in the shops and the foremen have some rights."

"Yes, I saw that—that's why I said I either had to give up my job or my religion."

"Yes, yes, boy, I see; pretty tough pill to take, but

your conscience won't die over night, not as long as it has been getting tougher right along."

"Oh, I can stand it until the spies arrive; then I've got to do one thing or the other."

"Yes, either stand by the men and your conscience, or by the perjurers and your job. Well, I'll give you my opinion in time enough."

It so happened that Yancey was approached by Wilson the day after and a supposititious case was presented to him, by a serious-faced fellow foreman who wanted to know did Yancey believe the stories told about spies being hired to enter unions and report on the men in the shops? "No," Yancey replied, "I couldn't believe in anything quite so damnable," and repeated that time-worn assertion: "It's a confounded Socialist lie, told to stir up strife between the men and their employers."

Wilson wore a sickly grin in memory of his belief of the day before.

"But suppose," he insisted, "that it was the truth and was being worked on us in this plant, what then?"

"Then—why—why—" Yancey was sparring for breath. Wilson was bringing it too close home for comfort. Was it possible there was a "leaker" on their little board. "Why, oh, hell, Wilson, what's the use; there ain't no sense in such talk. Why, man, if it was true it would drive every one of us who had an ounce of self-respect into the unions to fight it—that's all."

"That's me to a dot, Yancey, and I'm here to tell you I may call upon you one of these short days to repeat the last part of that warm talk of yours."

Feigning surprise, Yancey faced around from the blue print he had been examining.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Wait and see," Wilson answered as he hurried away.

From Yancey he went to Miller and went through the same process with him.

"That's all right, Wilson; I don't say there are no such things going on among the thousands and thousands of men who employ labor, but I contend that no man with a decent regard for the sanctity of an oath would be a party to a scheme to induce men to betray others

they had sworn to protect. Why, that's too far behind the 'ethics' of a heathen nation for a Christian to be able to comprehend the utter depravity of the thing."

Wilson stood nodding, nodding in affirmation as Miller laid down the moral law with swinging arms. When the latter paused, he asked:

"Now, suppose our firm, the Holdon Company, should enter into such a scheme and hire spies to join the unions represented here—suppose they did ? What would you do?"

"I'll tell you what I'd do," he looked about as though there were a possibility that the spies might be within earshot. "I'd help hang the spies, then organize the works from top to bottom and 'tend to Price. Say, little Mickey had him named right, when he called him 'stinker.' I'd tend to 'Stinker' Price later." He looked intently at his visitor for a time, then said: "Wilson, you don't mean to say there's anything like that going on here?" Then added, hastily: "It sounds too much like rant."

Wilson was laughing when he left Miller and went over to visit Moran on the casting floor. He would be even with Price yet. All he needed was to get Moses to agree to tell the several foremen over the more important departments the story as he had told it the day before, and there would be things doing in that plant. He walked into Moran's little cubby office in one corner of the shop and after a hasty "good morning," Moran looked out the window and turned back quickly.

"Wilson, unless you've got something that can't wait, I wish you would go; Price is coming and it won't be healthy for us foremen, office boys, I should have said, to be seen together." Wilson started for the door without a word.

"I'll come over in an hour," Moran called after him.

When Price entered, Moran was busy over his reports.

"What did you want?" the visitor asked.

"Why, I've got a man here I want to get rid of," Moran replied, without looking up.

"Well, why don't you write out your complaint and send it to the office? I can't be giving——"

"My complaint," Moran interrupted, still busy on his

work, "wouldn't look good even in the office. The man's a splendid worker."

"Well?"

"Well, the facts are, he's a union man and I am afraid he's having a bad effect on the others. He's constantly telling them, if they were organized they could knock out the piece work in a week."

Price reached out his hand.

"Moran, I am glad you brought this to my attention. Just write on your complaint blank, 'discharge recommended for the betterment of shop discipline,' and it will go straight to the secretary. I don't want to waste words with that sort of cattle."

He left the room and left behind him a man whose massive features were wreathed in smiles.

Williams, the man who was to be "discharged for the betterment of shop discipline," was a thorough union man, but he had a large family to support and, scenting trouble ahead, had quietly looked about for another job. As soon as he had found one, he opened up on the management and the non-unionists, before work began at noon and after the night whistle. Moran had gone to him the day before and suggested that he might hurt his cause by such tactics. Williams had replied that he wanted to be "canned."

Fifteen minutes after Price left the shop, Moran walked out of the office with a bit of paper in his hand. Williams guessed what was coming and stopped work to talk with a non-union man on the job next to him as Moran approached. With the eyes of at least fifty men upon him, men who had been telling each other he would be "canned," he took the slip of paper from Moran's hand. High words followed and finally, Moran ordered him from the floor.

Carson, bending over his flask, pounding sand for dear life, asked himself: "Was it possible that Moran was a traitor after all?" One of the best men on the floor, who had held out against the unionists, came along shortly after and pretending to want the loan of a tool, said to Carson:

"You can have my application at noon. I know, and every man in the shop knows, we can't go on in this

way. And, if men are to be fired because they are not afraid to say what they think, why, the sooner we are all outside the fence, the better."

That night several men in Moran's department whom the men hoped to get in had made application to the union, and all but two of them thought Moran in full sympathy with the management.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CARSON, PHYSICAL INSTRUCTOR.

In a quiet little hall on a side street, near the great Holdon plant, seven men had met to discuss the situation at the works.

"It's coming along just a little bit too fast to suit me," John Bulman was saying, when Carson, the big moulder, interrupted:

"It can't come too fast for me, and if it ever comes to a time when I can take a crack at 'Stinker' Price I won't begrudge a year's work."

"There's too much of that feeling in the works, too much; that's one thing we must curb." Brush was talking. Yancey laughed as he said:

"Talk about wild men. This is the third week under our piece-work system. The first day the men growled like the very devil, and our union boys laughed at the others, and then lit in and growled harder than any of them. At noon, the first day, every man on piece-work was figuring on his earnings from the time he'd swallowed his grub until the whistle blew. At night they were a glum-looking outfit. When a machine went wrong they fairly cussed the air blue. On day work they would have whistled and took their own time fixing it. Well, it's been getting worse all the time, and to-day the piece-work men held a meeting at noon and put it up to me to make a demand to-morrow for the old order of things."

"My men didn't hold a meeting," Brush reported, "because there's but few of them on piece-work, but I gave over half of them another two per cent cut in wages; the notice was posted day before yesterday, and things are looking black."

"My men," said Moran, "are all up in arms, from the sand boy up, and whenever Price so much as sticks

his nose inside there's enough under-breath cursing to sink a ship."

"Who can tell how any of the other foremen are coming?" Downey, organizer for the moulders, inquired.

"Well, Miller's been over to my place twice to-day, an' says he hopes to God the unions will get busy and get every man in the plant."

"Did you sound him, Brother Brush, as to his personal feelings in the matter?" Yancey inquired.

"No; I wanted to let him sweat a little longer. You see, Price wasn't nearly as well satisfied with either Miller's or Wilson's reports"—the men laughed—"as he was with ours, so he goes over to their departments and makes things fairly sizzle. When it gets hot enough, I'll see Miller again."

"How about Wilson?"

"Wilson's advising his new men to join the union, and told them if they'd make a clean job of it he'd go into it and help them till hell froze over."

"Bully for Wilson."

"That's the talk."

"And the next thing is to get the spies in and find out who's who," Bulman began, when Moran asked:

"How are we to handle the departments in which the foremen are not with us?"

"Why, we won't have spies sent into those departments."

"But if he does send them?"

"So much the worse for the spy, that's all," from Carson.

"Well, we want to agree upon just what is to be done. I believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, if we have to fight for it. Price will have injunctions served on every union, and there will be broken heads after the strike begins. If we have to fight for decent conditions against spy systems, injunctions, scabs and policemen, I, for one, am not going to be too nice about taking a whack at a head before the show opens, if it will make us one less to handle."

"Carson," said Brush, "we will make you a present of the job of *physical instructor,* without vote, without salary, without authority other than your two good arms,

and may God have pity upon the poor, shrunken-souled spy who gets within reach of them."

All joined in the laugh that followed the mock creation of this office, but Carson's savage snarl sobered them.

"Of course it is understood that nothing is to be done by any individual member of this committee without the sanction of the body," Bulman interposed; "also that the names of all applicants for membership in the unions represented here be withheld until this board is ready to act. It is also understood that the other shop foremen who do not come over by the time we are ready to make our demands are to be notified by the men in their departments that they shall refuse to work under them when the trouble is settled."

With this understanding, the conference broke up. At about the same time Price left the downtown apartments of the magnate and went to his rooms to dream of the conquest of a golden future in which he was to enjoy the fruits of another's labor.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SPIES.

"They've come," the foreman whispered to John Bulman one morning as the two met at the street corner. "Price had me in last night, when we knocked off, and he's as tickled as a kid with his first pants."

It was a grim smile that played about John's mouth, as he made answer: "And may God pity them."

And "they" who had arrived, lost no time in making it known in the departments to which they had been assigned that they were strongly in favor of unions. Many were the stories they narrated of strikes and lockouts in which, while they were not strikers, they had assisted the good cause by breaking a head or two when the chance offered. Off work, they were total strangers, until they were safely away from the men.

For four days, Price received the reports of his spies with joy mingled with a tempering doubt. The fifth day's report from both the moulder and machinist, were scarcely to his liking.

The machinist reported: Men mostly mum on question of union men in here; one man, John Bulman, is most dangerous, I should judge. He's got a lot of horse sense and says flat-footed that every man here ought to be in the union. I gave him my application to-day. He's a funny cuss, looked at me kind of queer and says, "Do you realize the gravity of the step you are taking?" He will bear watching. When word went round the shop that I'd signed up, some of the men I couldn't get a word with before thawed out, and I have commenced to pump them. (Signed) W. Y. Farley.

The moulder reported: Moulding floor is just about a "closed shop," or my ten years' experience in getting next goes for nothing. I'm to be taken into the union some time next week. My advice is for you to begin to work up a force to take hold here, for if I know anything about trouble signs, I see them in this plant. I put off telling you this until I was sure. (Signed) P. Johnson.

"They are either trying to earn their wages by giving me something to keep me awake, or I've been fooled in the men," was Price's comment as he finished the day's reports and sent for Moses, who took the papers, and after reading them locked them in the vault.

Out in the big plant about fifty men, machinists, moulders and blacksmiths, all men who had served almost if not quite as many years in their unions as they had at their trades, were taken into the leaders' confidence, and were assigned a part in the coming initiation of W. Y. Farley, P. Johnson and A. T. Jones.

A week passed, a week that brought but little comfort to the superintendent, as he read the reports of his spies, each day growing more lurid, as the men selected for this special duty plied the company's men with material intended to unsettle the mind of "Stinker" Price.

The week in passing afforded the men ample opportunity to perfect their plans for the initiation of the spies. The hall secured, the several men who were to assume the role of officials were drilled in their parts. All were instructed to wear masks, and the stage being set, each of the three men was instructed to appear for initiation. The machinist at seven-thirty, the moulder at eight, and the blacksmith at eight-thirty. It was impressed upon the would-be members that they must be punctual, or they might have to wait two weeks longer before being taken into the organizations.

"Where do you go to ride the goat?" Johnson asked Jones.

"Over on Randolph somewhere, I've got the number here."

"Why, that's damned funny; that's where I go!" exclaimed Johnson.

"Oh, that's all right, there may be a dozen unions in the one building," Jones assured him.

So the two arranged to go together. At seven-thirty, both men were standing on the pavement in front of the number to which they had been directed.

"There went three of our men," Jones observed as a half-dozen workers entered the building.

"And there goes Farley,—I'll——"

"Let him go," Johnson interrupted, catching his companion by the arm. "I don't have to show up until

eight, and I guess we better not be seen together; it might not pay in the end. I'm going to a saloon; see you to-morrow night and talk goat."

Farley was met at the landing by a young fellow whom he had never seen before.

"Is one of you gents Mr. Farley?" the latter questioned, as Farley came up with two others.

"I'm Farley."

"You're the man, then. Well, the machinists sent me down to look for you, they are waiting."

"All right, go ahead," Farley answered as his guide started up a second flight of stairs.

The guide pushed him through a doorway, the door closed behind him and he heard a key turned in the lock. Three men entered through another doorway, each wearing a mask.

"Hello, you put on some extra touches out here. I—" the astonished candidate began when he was interrupted by one of the masked men.

"What extra touches, brother?"

"Why, them blinkers," he replied.

"Brother, your application states that you have never been a member of our order, what can you know of its initiation?"

"Nothing, I—I only thought labor unions didn't use such things."

"You will know more after your initiation," the mask replied.

Another mask stepped forward, and solemnly said: "Brother, you have given one of our brothers an appliaction for membership. Did you do this of your own free will?"

"Yes, sir," the candidate answered.

"As you cannot know the nature of the obligation you are to take to-night, I am instructed to inform you that it is both solemn and binding, yet it will in no way conflict with your duties as a citizen, neither will it interfere with your religious belief. With this assurance on my part and on the part of the brothers here, are you willing to take the obligation?"

"I am."

"Then may God help you. Brothers prepare the candidate for initiation."

"That's a murderous looking gun you carry," one of the men observed, as he took a thirty-eight caliber automatic revolver from Farley's pocket.

"Here, give me that gun!" The candidate made a grab for it, when his arm was caught by one of the men.

"Not so fast, brother, not so fast; that gun might scare the goat. We'll keep it until we get through and come out for your clothes."

"All right, pard, keep it; but, on the level, I don't like this undressing business," he protested, as they stripped him to shirt and pants, and led him into the hall.

Farley may live to join several other unions, but he will never forget the sight that met his gaze as he was led into the hall. The stillness of a living death brooded over it. Four stations in the hall were occupied by robed figures, masked and bearded, while the masked members banked upon either side, sat rigid in their chairs.

"They do things in style out here, all right," the candidate whispered as he was being led to the first station.

"Worthy Past President," the voice of the guide droned on the silence as he swung about to face the station, while in the far end of the hall four raps of the gavel sounded, and every man was upon his feet in an instant.

"I bring before you a man from the great body of unorganized labor, who is desirous of joining our order. Will you question him?"

The worthy Past President cleared his throat with an audible effort and began: "Fellow worker, this good brother who acts as your guide assures me that you desire to become a member of our order, is this true?"

"It is."

"Do you know that you will be required to take an obligation binding upon you before God and man, an obligation that none but a renegade, without sense of honor would betray? Do you realize the solemnity of an oath and that you must take this obligation before our secrets may be revealed to you?"

"I do."

"Guide, you will escort the candidate around the hall in order that each member may closely scrutinize

him before he is allowed to take the obligation." The speaker lifted his voice and added: "If there be aught against him, if one of the brothers present knows of any good reason why W. Y. Farley should not be admitted, let him make his objection known, before the oath is administered." A single rap from the gavel, and the banked rows of masks peered from their chairs as the two, guide and candidate, took up their march about the hall.

"Most Worthy President," again they halted and again the gavel rapped the members to their feet, "I bring before you a fellow worker, who has answered all questions satisfactorily, who has also passed under close scrutiny of the brothers here present. This brother desires membership in our order, and I present him for initiation."

"He has answered all questions?"

"He has."

"He has been duly elected?"

The clerk answered, "He has."

"His initiation fees are paid?"

"They are," the treasurer replied.

"Then, my brother, in the presence of God and the brothers here assembled, I ask you; are you willing to take an oath of allegiance to this order, an oath that will bind you before all men to keep inviolate the secret business of this organization?"

"I am." The words came in a low tone of voice.

"Speak louder," the guide admonished.

"I am," the candidate's affirmation was heard to the ends of the hall.

"You will repeat after me, using your name where I use mine, the following obligation: "I, W. V. Smith," (the candidate repeated, "I, W. Y. Farley,") "do solemnly swear in the presence of God and the witnesses here assembled; that I will never reveal any of the secret business, signs or passwords, oral or written, that may be given me at this time, or at any time in the future, to any one not a member of this order, and as much entitled to them as I am. I further swear, as God is my witness, that I will never use my membership in this organization for any end not sanctioned by its membership. That I will obey the officers of the organization

and be orderly in meetings, and by my daily walk in life endeavor to so live that I shall not bring discredit upon the order or upon my fellow members. If I should prove unworthy or false to my oath of allegiance, may my deceived fellow workers mete out to me such punishment as they deem adequate to fit my treachery."

"To all of this you most solemnly pledge yourself before God and men."

"I do."

"May God help you," the president's voice was almost a sob.

"Has Farley taken the oath?" came a voice from the door as a large man pushed his way in.

"He has," the president answered.

"Well, he's a traitor and a spy?" the big man shouted as he made rapidly for the front of the hall.

"Brother this is an——

"Let me out of this!" Farley shrieked and struck viciously at the guide who clung to him. "Let me out, you damned—" he thundered, and pulling away from the guide, made a dash for the door. Shaking in every fiber of his body, he was recaptured and half led, half dragged before the presiding officer.

"This is a most serious charge, brother, a charge of treason coming on the heels of your most solemn oath," the president's voice was tense.

"And I can prove it," the big man declared, puffing after his exertions.

"Produce your proof," came from the chair.

"That's easy; this guy who calls himself Farley isn't Farley at all. He is one of those Corporations' Protective something's spies, and he works in old Holdon's plant, and we've got the goods on him."

"Brother, is this true?" the president asked.

"True or not, I'm game. You run me into a regular plant, and I've got to take my medicine——"

He got no further; the president shouted, in order to be heard—"The committee on traitors will take this worse than scab in charge."

Farley broke away from the guide and struck at the first man who attempted to lay hands upon him, but five minutes later he was carried out of the hall unconscious.

"Bring in the next candidate."

And again at the proper time, the big man at the door made his charge of treason against an oath-bound member, who thought he had joined the moulders' union, and again the presiding officer called—"Bring in the next candidate."

In the end three men had gone through the intitiation and of the three, Farley alone showed fight.

Johnson and Jones both confessed, begged, promised and pleaded, yet they went the same way. From the alley, three closed carriages, each carrying three passengers, issued at various times that night and whirled away into the maw of the town.

"A labor leader overcome with eloquence," one man said to another at the alley's mouth as two men carried a third to the waiting carriage and bundled him in.

"Or rotgut," the other laughed.

Price sat at his desk the next morning, busy with a refractory thought when Moses Webster entered. "Mr. Farley's in a cab—says he can't come in, and wants to see you."

"What? Farley? Isn't he working?"

"Don't look like it," Moses admitted aloud, and to himself he said: "I wonder what they did to him?"

"Farley!" Price went white when he saw the battered spy propped up in a corner of the cab. "In the name of God, man——"

"I don't want to hear no more name of God for a year," Farley interrupted with a snarl. "I got my fill of that last night."

"But—but—man, what's the matter with you?"

"I've been eaten up and spit out, that's what's the matter, and see here"—he loosened his suspenders on one side and pulling his clothing apart, disclosed a great livid welt upon his hip.

Price wide-eyed and disconcerted, stood silent.

"Yes, damn them, and there's another just like it on my back. I've got to get into a hospital and get fixed up; that's why I am here—I want money."

"You want money? Why, man, you are paid by the Protective."

"That's all right, but I need it now, and bad. I tell you I'm all in. Those devils almost killed me."

"Mr. Price, you are wanted on the 'phone. Some hospital says a man there claims to have been slugged by union men and says you will——"

Price went hastily to the 'phone. When he returned, he simply asked the waiting man how much he needed.

"Oh, a hundred will see me started all right—and say, Price—" when he had pocketed the money—"my advice to you is to give the men something and don't try to run any more of our kind in on them. They are the wisest bunch I ever went up against. I'll write."

Price went all the way to the street corner and stood staring after the cab. "Now what could he have meant?" he asked himself as he went slowly back to his office. Mechanically, he picked up a morning paper. A two-column scare-head caught his eye and he read:

"MORE UNION SLUGGERS IN MURDEROUS ATTACK.

Three Inoffensive Citizens in as Many Districts of the City Mercilessly Beaten While on their Way Home from Downtown District.

At midnight W. Y. Farley, a machinist, was found at the back door of a saloon on Sixty-third street in a frightful condition. As near as could be gathered from his disconnected story, he had had some trouble with a union or with certain members of it some time ago, and had all but forgotten it, when he was set upon by a dozen men somewhere on Halsted, north of Sixty-third street, while on his way home. He was terribly beaten and evidently left for dead.

The second case is more atrocious, if that be possible. A moulder, who refuses to give his name for fear of the union's slugging committee, was found about one o'clock this morning by Policeman Dooley on Clark, near Lincoln Park. He had been assaulted on Wells street while going quietly home. Besides numerous bruises, this man was terribly burned, with acids, it is thought. At the county hospital he gave the name of one of our leading employers, but asked that no mention be made of the case, as he feared for his life.

The third case, furnishing substantial proof that certain labor organizations of this city are banded together in a conspiracy to intimidate or murder individual workers who refuse to be cajoled or driven into the unions, comes from the west side. On Madison street near Western avenue a belated pedestrian stumbled over a man lying at the entrance to a dark alley. An alarm was given, and when assistance arrived the victim of a union's vengeance was carried to a drug store and revived. His story is materially the same as of the two quoted above.

A hard-working mechanic, trying to earn an honest living

as a blacksmith, is approached by emissaries of the blacksmiths' union, who, it seems, are preparing to compel their employer to grant certain demands or have his business wrecked.

This man, who desires to have his name withheld for a time, refused to listen to the union agitators, and was pointedly told that yesterday was his last day of grace. Laughingly, he informed them that he still lived in a free country and proposed to remain free. As a result he lies bruised and burned in the Sisters' Hospital, and his family, in Cleveland, Ohio, may take what little comfort they can out of the statement that he will live."

"So, that's how it panned out," Price said aloud, after reading the newspaper report of the "slugging." "They must have been a bunch of dubs, but who the devil put the unions next?"

An office boy stood at Price's elbow.

"Well, what now?"

"Please sir, some of the men wants to see you."

"Well, I'm here; show them in."

And in they came, five of them, led by a big burly fellow from one of the forges who pulled at his coat collar and cleared his throat at every step. The delegation filed into the office and arranged themselves in a row, each looking at his neighbor for encouragement and finding in the faces of his fellows an equal embarrassment, driving all thought of a fixed purpose from their minds. Price, always insolent and overbearing with the men, eyed this delegation with open contempt, and they felt it instinctively rather than by process of reasoning, as their eyes turned from time to time, during the leaden moments of silence to his sneering face.

"Well, men, what's the matter? Have you struck?"

"Hem, hem, you tell him Smith," the big burly man from the forge turned appealing eyes upon a little thin-faced fellow at the end of the line.

"I wasn't elected no chairman of this here committee," Smith protested.

"Well, men, whichever one of you is to make the spiel, let's have it." Price grinned sardonically at the foot-shuffling group. "I'd ask you to sit down, but I'm in a hurry," he explained.

"Th' men did 'lect me chairman an'—an' I had some resolutions as has bin passed." The man from the forge fumbled in his pockets, and Price, with out-

stretched hand and snapping fingers, sat square-jawed and grim.

"You put them resolutions in your hip pocket, Jim. I seen you," one of the committee ventured.

"So I did, so I did." Jim heaved a sigh of relief, as he pulled out the document in question, and placed it in Price's outstretched palm.

Price tapped the papers on the desk. "Well, men, say it and get out—what else?"

"Why, just this here; we gives you one week from today to make up your mind in, an' we'll be back here for an answer, that's all."

"What do you want? Don't you know that if Holdon was here, the last one of you would have been fired out into the street long ago? I've put up with you and your insolence just as long as I'm going to." He got up and kicked the chairs back. "Now get out; for a cent I'd fire the whole bunch."

"Do it, do it, and we'll take the last man in the works out with us," the big, burly man from the forge announced with a meaning shake of his huge labor grimed fist, having found both voice and control of his other faculties at last, "You try it on, Mister!" he taunted from the doorway. "We'll be here one week from today for our answer to them demands and if you ain't lookin' for trouble, take my advice and consider them serious."

The committee could be seen from the office window, breaking up into individual units and so making itself a part of the great labor army in the Holdon plant.

"Well, I'll be literally—" the superintendent commented, as he stood watching the men as they went to their several shops. "One week, one week," and turning to the desk, he stood looking at the thumb-marked "demands" of the men.

Moses Webster entered the office and laid a telegram on Price's desk. "Cabled from Bombay," was his terse comment as he turned to leave the room. Price picked up the cipher message, and gazed at it speculatively before taking up Moses' translation just beside it.

"Closed contract for biggest job in India. Specifications follow. Rush your work.—Holdon."

Price read it and sat down limply. At any other

time he would have rejoiced that the job they had figured on for two years had been safely landed, but today the news of this success carried another meaning. He had determined to bluff it out with the men when they came for their answer the next week. Now in the light of Holdon's cable to rush work, he couldn't think of inviting a strike. An hour after Price had been made acquainted with the contents of Holdon's message, the council of the unions was also possessed of the news and from the leaders word went to the men that their demands would be granted.

"There's only one thing to do," Yancey told Price the day before the committee was to call for its answer.

"And that——"

"And that is to grant the demands of the men." Price scowled and Yancey hurried on: "They ain't asking much—only to be put back on the old basis, with an increase of about 3 per cent in the mechanical departments."

"But what right have they to make such demands?"

"The right organization gives them, I guess."

"But there isn't a handful of them that's organ——"

"And there you are mistaken," Yancey hastened to correct him. "Practically all my men are organized, and they are my best mechanics at that."

"Do you," Price turned an anxious face to the foreman, "do you really believe they would strike if these demands were not granted?"

"As sure as fate." Yancey answered, and enlarged upon the theme: "You see, Mr. Price, the men have been restless since you changed the work and prices, and that spy business has not helped matters any. Besides, they have gotton it into their heads that if Holdon was here they would never have been put on piece-work—in short, that he does not know of the changes you have made, and would not stand for them if he did, and they have not been slow to grasp the fact that if this is the case you won't dare to face a strike."

Price sat, biting his lips, while Yancey put the case thus bluntly. For a time there was silence after the foreman ceased speaking, then Price looked up to say:

"I'll think the matter over, Yancey, I suppose the

committee will be here on time." He had tried hard to smile, but had not quite succeeded when the foreman left the office.

It proved an easy victory for the men. Thursday was the day set for the committee to call upon the superintendent, but he forestalled them by having notices posted on the bulletin-board, and upon all the shop doors, to the effect that commencing the next month the old system of work would prevail, and an increase of two and one-half per cent in wages would be paid from that date.

There was rejoicing among the men from end to end of the great plant. It is needless to say this rejoicing did not reach into Price's office. That gentleman was cudgeling his wits in a vain endeavor to evolve a plan which would lead him to the discovery of the "leak" through which the unions had gotten next to his hired spies. And, although he failed, he still hoped to get in touch with some worker in the plant who would be able to give him the right "steer."

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

A DETECTIVE STORY.

"Will he come, Mickey?" The speaker looked up from her work upon a tiny garment.

"Yes, missus, he'll come fast enough dis time."

"What did you write him?" she demanded, even in her distress, jealous that any one should have more power over the man than she possessed.

"A business letter, strictly," Mickey answered without looking up from a copy of the "Old Sleuth" library.

"Mickey," she walked over to him and put her hands upon his head and strove to make him look at her. "You haven't given me a good, square look since you wheedled me into moving here, and you are always looking at me when you think I don't see you. Mickey, you know my heart is breaking; can you sit by and see me suffer day after day and refuse to tell me if you know anything about—about—about things?" Her eyes were bright, a dry bright, that told of tears spent in the nights that had gone before.

Mickey had set his jaws and with neck stiffened resisted her effort to make him look at her. He knew if his eyes ever looked into hers while that plea was on her lips he would surrender and the whole story would come out, and this did not suit his purpose. Finally he said:

"Missus, he's a-comin' this week sure, an' if he leaves youse again, an' youse kin say to me, 'Mickey, I don't love him no more an' I won't have nothin' t' do with him,' I'll tell youse everything I knows an' it's a heap. But, you must promise you won't say nothin' t' him about it."

"I will not promise to deceive my husband," she protested.

"Yer husband?" It was a question.

In a twinkling Estella was on her knees by his side.

"Oh, Mickey! Mickey! I thought you didn't know."

"Missus, don't, don't, youse'll kill me." He got to his feet. "I knows it all, lady, an' I hope God strikes me dead if I don't wish I'd croaked before I ever seen Jo—, either of youse." He rushed from the room and left Estella upon her knees by his chair.

Mickey was sure Joel would visit Cairo that week. He had made excuse that his business would keep him in the north for at least another month in his last letter to Estella. Still, Mickey was sure he would write and tell her he would arrive that week. When they left Michigan City Mickey had three hundred and fifteen dollars, the proceeds of the furniture sale, and the two hundred dollars left at the house by Joel.

Mr. James Y. Johnson had wired Estella on a Saturday to give possession of the furniture the next Monday and go to No. ——, Hendee street, Cairo, Ill., and that he would arrive there the following Tuesday.

Arrived at Cairo, mistress and servant found that Joel had wired for a cottage and telegraphed two hundred dollars to the real estate man to be delivered to Mrs. James Y. Johnson. Mickey, with an eye single to the future, suggested that they take up the two hundred dollars at the real estate office and buy as little furniture as they could possibly get along with, and save the money for other expenses. Estella agreed. In fact, she would have agreed to anything proposed to her by Mickey, so completely mystified was she over the order that had come to her to move.

Tuesday came and went, and still no letter for her.

Two months passed and Mickey had received two letters under his new name, while she had received but one, enclosing one hundred dollars for expenses. She turned the money over to Mickey with the remark that he might as well keep it, she didn't go downtown anyway.

When nine weeks had passed, Estella received a letter, and ran to her room to read it. Mickey, standing at the dining room door, heard a low moan, and running in, found her stretched upon the floor insensible. He

gathered her up in his arms and kissed her and cried over her as he put her on the bed. Then he picked up the letter and hastened to a neighbor's to get help.

While the women worked over Estella, he read Joel's letter. The sum and substance of it was that business would keep him away another month. Couldn't she find another man to amuse herself with, or was she too far gone for that?

One of the women came out of Estella's room, looked curiously at Mickey a moment, then said:

"Your wife ought to have a woman with her, sir."

"My wife! Why, she ain't my wife. Her man's a swell guy; I'm a' errand boy."

The woman grinned and went back. But, as a result of their neighborly interest, Estella had a servant girl, black as coal and as good humored as a pet coon, duly installed the next day.

That night as Mickey lay thinking of the misery he had seen in Estella's eyes as he sat down to his supper, he decided to bring Joel to Cairo if the whole heavens fell as soon as he got there.

"I've bin a lyin', low-lived, white-livered whelp ever since I took dis job, an' one lie more or less ain't a-goin' to sink th' ship. I'm goin' t' write him first thing in th' mornin'." And this is the letter:

Mr. Manning, care Eagle Club, chicago:

Affectionly yours;

This here letter gits away frum me when I haint got bud $11.00 and no sence, an' I got all th'.money yor womming had too.

Captyn, it was this way. i got too tips on a race horse down to Memfies what was to run thaer. i had it doped out to me bi a fellow wot sayed he knowed, an' he lyed. Then i backs anothyre pony a 20 to 1 shoot to git da coin back, an' dammitt, that one gits blancketyd to. Say we got to have some money cause we can't live much on this aire. And you wanter come rite along ith the money, cause i got somthynze i must tell you i don't dares to rite it. John Williams,

Yourse treuley,

Mickey Dougherty.

P. s.—i aint foolisch. Yo must come this hear weak er i sells da furnisher an' we comes to Chi.

youse trueley. Mickey Dougherty
nix John Williams

At the Eagle Joel sat with a couple of congenial com-

panions recounting the features of a little splurge they had engaged in the night before at Madam Vaughn's, when one of the attaches signalled Joel, who shook his head; the man persisting, Joel got up and went over to a vacant table in the smoking parlor. There the man joined him, and taking Mickey's letter from his pocket, said:

"Mr. Holdon, this came under special delivery, as you see, so you will excuse me for interrupting you."

A silver dollar was Joel's answer, but he scowled frightfully as he opened the envelope.

When he had mastered the contents of the letter we have read, he sat staring ahead.

"The little beggar," he muttered. "So he took a whirl with the ponies and is broke. He says Estella gave him all her money. She probably lied to the little runt, but after all, his threat that he will sell the stuff they have and come to Chicago will have to be looked after. I was a fool to take him on in the first place. He knows too much about my people." He sat silent, biting his nails and frowning. "Yes, we might as well have it over with. I'll run down and give Mickey a little money, and the woman enough to see her through her trouble. Then, I'm done with the whole business."

He rejoined his companions and seemed as free of care, did this man with money enough to buy twentieth century indulgences from society, as men felt who were once able to buy like indulgences from a ruling church.

Had Mickey gambled on the races and lost? Not he; instead he had established quite a reputation as a curb-stone broker, who would take a watch worth ten dollars, or a revolver worth five dollars for a week or two, as security for a small sum at big interest. No, he had not lost money, and as he waited the coming of Joel, his greatest uneasiness resulted from fear that Estella would lose confidence in him, and he did not feel that he could trust her with his secret.

"When he's gone, I'll jest tell her why I sent fer him. We was all out of money, 'cause I lost it, but I won't lose no more. An' ef she wants t' lecture me, I guess I cud stand it. Fac's is, I'd give anything t' see her get up enough ginger t' cuss some one out proper."

When Joel reached Cairo the second day after he re-

ceived Mickey's letter, he went to a hotel and from there sent a negro boy with a verbal message to the cripple.

"Wat's dat, boy? Take dat mush outin' yer chops an' talk 'Mericain', cain't yer?"

"Day's a gent, name of Manning to de hotel wants powerful bad t' see you-all, an' him sais you-all was t' come erlong wid me," the boy repeated.

"The gent says all of us is ter come, does he?" Mickey demanded, wondering why he wanted Estella to go to the hotel.

"No, him says jus' you-all is to come, an' him says not fer me t' tell you-all 'fore no women folkses."

"That's more like it, me buck. Jist wait till I gits ready, will youse? Go 'round th' corner an' wait. I'll be there in a jiffy."

Mickey ran to his room and put a short thirty-eight calibre revolver in his pocket, then hid his money and started. When they entered the hotel lobby Manning was not in sight, and they were going out to look about when the clerk called them.

"Looking for Mr. Manning?"

"Yep." The clerk looked hard at the twisted little figure, called "Front" and motioned the visitors to follow the bell boy.

"Well, whose there?" Joel demanded, when the bell boy knocked.

"It's me, Mr. John Williams," Mickey sang out.

Joel opened the door, but only scowled, when Mickey saluted him with a "Howdy, Captain."

Pulling a quarter from his pocket, Joel handed it to the negro boy, caught Mickey by the shoulder and pushed him into the room.

When those on the outside had started down the hall, he locked the door and put the key into his pocket. Mickey had always been credited with having a grain of "sand," for each atom of his shrunken body, but as he looked into Joel's eyes when he turned from the door he felt that he had not made a mistake when he put the revolver in his pocket.

"Well," Joel stood silent glaring at his visitor.

"Water's deep in that well, ain't it? Youse seem to take a long time to reach bottom."

"I don't want any lip from you, my man, and——"

"Don't need to have none; jist talk biz; I hain't in th' well business nohow."

"Say, you young devil, I've a notion to wring your neck." Joel took a step toward the cripple.

"An' again, youse has a notion not t' do it. I hain't wantin' no trouble er nothin', but it's jist as I told youse in me letter. We got to have some of th' mazuma t' buy stuff t' live on. An' I thought youse wanted me to keep youse posted. Calculate I am goin' t' write 'bout th' two men as come here from Chi a-lookin' up 'Steller? Not me! I wants to see youse, so we kin lay our plans."

At mention of men who were on his trail, Joel turned a sickish white.

"You say two men have been here looking for her?" he asked, and sat down.

"Yep, they went to Michigan City first, an' got a description of youse an' th' woman, from some of them old pussies as got t' be imitate with her, and——"

"It's the detectives her people hired in Chicago to trace her." Joel paced up and down the room. "When did you last see them?" He halted in front of his caller.

"Why, it was th' day afore I writ to youse. I was downtown to buy some things an' one of them twigs me. I didn't tumble fer a while an' when I did, it was too late. He jist kept to my heels an' I knowed ef I went t' th' house he'd shadow the crib 'till he got his lamps on yer woman. Then th' game wud be off. So what does I do but take them groceries an' go most t' th' other end of town, an' th' first big house I comes t' I goes in a gate at th' side, an' when he couldn't see me no more, I heaves th' stuff over a fence an' takes out th' back way."

"And then?" Joel was smiling.

"Why, Captain, I makes me git-away an' keeps mighty close till after I gits that letter off. Then I cusses myself fer two solid hours fer bein' th' biggest fool in th' state."

"I don't see——"

"Youse don't see? W'y it's plain as a rummie's nose. W'y, s'pose youse ud a-come down here an' them fly cops ud a spotted youse—huh!"

"Damn it, I hadn't thought of that," the employer frowned.

"No, ner me, but I puts in th' most of the day a-thinkin' what a mess I'd got youse inter, an' I says: 'Th' captain allus hes bin square as a box with youse, Mickey, an' this ain't no time to be runnin' him up against no plain clothes men, an' by crimeny, I twigged the racket that ud send 'em out of town on th' double quick."

"Did you do it, Mickey, did you?" Joel fairly beamed so great was his relief.

"Yep, an' done it jist as easy. Yisterday mornin' I comes downtown an' waits around watchin' fer dem geezers. Purty soon, I sees one ov 'em in front of th' Planters hotel. I watches till he walks t' th' corner, then I comes up behin' him an' asks him jist like I'd never seed him afore: 'Say, mister, could youse give a cripple somethin' t' do?' Lord, he bit quick. 'Sure thing,' says he. 'come t' th' hotel,' he says. Well, we goes down there an' he brings me up t' his room, an' telephones t' th' clerk to send out somewheres fer his side kick. Say, Captain, he was most as well pleased s' ef he'd drawed a prize, but he didn't make no move t' do biz till his partner come. Then they both lit in, an' I done some tall lyin'. They asks me what I was doin' yisterday. W'y, I was deliverin' groceries, special order. How long I bin in th' town? Most six weeks. Did I come with a man—describin' youse, Captain—Yep."

"You didn't——"

"Wait, Captain. I says 'yep.' 'Was der a lady?' 'Yep.' 'Does she look like so an' so?' 'Yep,' again. An' I could see dem geezers a-winkin' t' one another an' a-swellin' up t' think what a easy mark they'd struck. 'Well, me man,' says one of 'em, 'where are they now?' An' right there I does th' baby act fit t' split. Say, I kin go on th' vaudivil stage. W'y, them fly cops jist sets there an' says goo-goo words like they's talkin' t' a kid. 'Tell us where they are an' we'll see 'at youse gits enough money t' go back t' Chicago on,' one of 'em tells me; an' I tells de pinchers youse takes de gal an' skips t' Atlantic, Georgia, a-leavin' me in de lurch most two weeks ago."

"You didn't! Glory, but you're the cheese, Mickey." Joel reached out a hand that Mickey pretended not to see.

"Sure, I did, an' after a-doin' all dis, you hits de town an' acks like youse wants t' eat me up."

"I'm sorry, sorry, old man." Again he reached out a hand; this time Mickey saw it, shook it, and shook it quick.

"And they hit the grit?"

"Sure Mike! I watched 'em till they got their tickets, seen 'em on th' train, then I looks at th' ten plunks dey puts up fer me con talk an' goes home."

"Say, Mickey, you're a jewel, and we won't quarrel if you did lose money on the ponies." Joel was in the best of humor. "I had intended to give you a blowing up and send word to Stell to go to the devil, but if her people are on my trail I've got to stay in the game until they give up. Lord, if the detectives were to get next to me it would cost thousands of dollars and no end of trouble to get clear. You did the right thing, Mickey, the only thing, and I'll be darned if I can understand how you thought it all out."

The magnate's son paced the length of the room, while Mickey sat with his eyes on the floor.

"You'll have to move again, Mickey, and this time I guess you better go to Texas."

"Texas?" Mickey's voice came from his shoes. To him Texas was just on the other side of the world.

"Yes, there's Dallas. It's a fine town, and only about a day's ride from here. Yes, you'll have to move. I'll go up and see Estella, and tell her the climate will suit her better there. Come on!"

Mickey communed with himself as they went in silence to the house.

"So we goes t' Texas—th' skunk! Well, it's me as goes wherever she does. Ain't she most educated me —w'y, I kin almost talk United States now, an' I kin—I wonder if kin is right—I kin write somethin' fierce. An' when it comes to swear words, she's jest about broke me of that. W'y, she don't need only t' look sorry, an' I'm dam—no, I'm doggoned ef I don't want t' go jump in th' river. I'll go t' Texas, but not less th' missus says so."

CHAPTER II.

JOEL LEAVES CAIRO.

What passed between Joel and the woman he had so grossly betrayed, beyond the scene enacted when Estella saw them as they entered at the gate and with a cry of glad surprise threw herself into Joel's arms, to be fairly picked up and carried into her room, Mickey never knew. He saw no more of Estella that night, but he had a business talk with Joel, who instructed him to send Estella to Dallas within a day or two, and to tell the servant-girl she was going to Chicago. Then he was to dispose of the furniture and follow. He gave Mickey the name of a Dallas hotel, and after handing him two hundred dollars, promised to send him as much more the next month.

In the morning Mickey was on the front porch, when he heard Estella and Joel discussing the move to Dallas. Joel said something about a hospital, and Estella seemed to be pleading with him. Finally, Joel gave utterance to an oath, and again asked a question. Mickey strained every faculty to catch her reply, but he had little need to exert himself, the reply came clear and true.

"My God, my God! What have I done? You, of all men, to ask me to do this?" Her voice was raised, almost a shriek. "I will not! I will not kill my baby!" There came a sound as of a dead weight falling, hurried steps from the dining room, and Mickey standing as one stunned heard Joel cursing in the hall as he halted to get his suit-case, coat and hat. Mickey ran in just as Joel was struggling into his coat.

"Get that wench and see to Stell, she's fainted. I'm going. Do all I've told you and I'll make it right with you."

He rushed out of the house, but Mickey was on his knees beside the woman he loved better than his own life before Joel had reached the door.

"Oh, my poor Stella, my poor Stella. I'll kill him; I will; so help me God! I'll kill him ef he ever touches youse agin."

For the second time in his life, he kissed her lips and hair, then left her to find the girl, who had gone to visit with a neighbor's servant a few minutes before.

"I'm goin' ter give her a chance t' hear what I've got t' say jist as soon as she comes outen it sufficient," Mickey said to himself when assured that Estella was able to go to her room. And he further promised himself a good kicking for having brought Joel to the house.

"Gee, but he wus easy; an' two hundred more plunks t' de good, an' we ain't a-goin t' move, not immegeately. I got to collect on my capital w'at I've loaned out. An' them niggers an' poor whites is dead easy when they has a sport t' deal wid," was his comment as he went down town to make sure that Joel had gone.

For two days, Estella kept her room and when she did appear, the third day after Joel's departure, Mickey's eyes took on a hard, cold glaze as he looked at her wan face, beautiful even in it's sadness. She sat in a big rocker by the window and motioned him to bring a chair and sit by her. There was a world of weariness in her voice as she asked:

"When do we move again, Mickey?"

"Not till youse is ready," he answered.

"But didn't J—, didn't he tell you something about going right away?"

"I didn't understan' it that way, 'less youse wants t' go."

"Oh, I do Mickey. We may have stayed too long now; they may come back."

"Who's comin' back, lady?" Mickey was frightened. He thought that Estella was "seeing things."

"The detectives, the men my people hired to look for me."

Mickey's eyes widened. His relief was so great, he almost laughed aloud.

"Who told yer they was fly cops here lookin' fer youse?" he demanded.

"He did—he told me, when I refused to move again without him, he told me I could either do that or let my people find me."

"It's a dirty, low-lived lie!" Mickey was hammering the window-sill with as much gusto as though it were the head of Joel Holdon.

"A lie, Mickey? Oh, don't say he deliberately lied to me," the woman pleaded.

"It wouldn't be th' first one, would it?" he demanded. "An' fer w'y should youse be frightened, missus; don't youse want yer folks t' find youse?" The question was asked in all honesty.

"No! No! No! Anything but that, anything but that!"

"Well, I'll be dam— 'scuse me missus, but youse lays it over enybody. Say, why don't youse want t' see yer people?"

"Oh, Mickey, I have no wedding ring, no ring!" At the last word, she seemed to grow faint and struggled for breath. Mickey bent over her.

"Missus, missus; I'll git youse a weddin' ring; a nice, big, fat one like they has in 'Chi' in th' big stores. Jist youse let me git th' size of your—which one is it th' guys what loves wimmen puts it on?" In spite of her sorrow, Estella could not help but smile at the earnest face, and eloquent eyes of her esquire, as he stood by her side fitting a bit of paper to her finger.

"I'll git one ef it costs a hundred." he declared. "Ef that's all as keeps youse from a wantin' to' see yer folks, it's a-goin' t' be fixed."

For a long time, Estella sat with her hand upon his arm, debating whether or not to open the eyes of this vassal of hers to that part of the moral code in which his education had been neglected. Finally, she turned to him with:

"Mickey, you must not pay too much for my wedding ring, we must move some day soon and we can't go without money."

"Don't youse git t' frettin' 'bout money, missus; I got five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars!" Estella exclaimed. "Five hundred? Why he told me you had gambled all your money away, and all I gave you!"

"It was a white-livered lie lady, a low-down lie. I'll tell youse jist how it was. Youse see——"

"No, Mickey, I won't hear a word. Go and buy my wedding ring, then we will talk about moving."

"But, missus, I want t' tell youse how it was."

"And I cannot listen to you, Mickey," she protested.

As he stood in the hall getting into his coat, he heard her say: "I wonder why James told me that—I wonder why?"

"Well, I'll be literally clawed inter shoestrings, ef I knows what good she's a-goin' ter git outin' a weddin' ring. Queer idea she's got, but, by crimeny, I'd git her one ef it took th' last cent in the house." So he communed with himself on the way down town; and get the ring he did. When he slipped it on her finger, he remembered how the heroes in his stories always kissed the hand of the lady when they couldn't do any better, so Mickey planted a good, honest smack fair on the back of Estella's hand, then bolted.

For a week, Estella said nothing about moving, and Mickey had come to the conclusion that his business as a curb-broker was not to be disturbed, when he was invited to a conference.

"Now, Mickey," she began. "I guess we better be getting ready to move. In fact, we should have started a week ago."

"Youse mean it?" His surprise was only too evident. "Youse ain't goin' to go where he says, to Texas?"

"Yes, to Texas."

"But, missus, he won't never go away down there t' see youse an' he's told me——"

A hand was placed over his lips. "Mickey, Mickey, not another word. I'm going to give him another chance."

Mickey twisted himself free, looked up into her face, radiant with a new-born hope.

"Another chanst," he repeated lamely.

"Yes, another chance. Mickey, I'm going to Dallas and when my baby comes, I—I—" Her hand went up to her throat. "I, O God! I must believe in him or go mad. Help me, Mickey, help me!" His arms, like the arms of a great ape, went out and held her. Something she saw in his eyes frightened her, and he, quick to see, released her as she began struggling. "'Scuse me,

missus, I jist thought youse was goin' t' fall." Then, as she sat down, he hurried on. "I kin git youse away termorrer, an' when I sells th' junk an' squares everything up, I'll come erlong. An' youse jist go to th' hotel an' stay till I come. We'll look fer a house an' a good nigger girl soon as ever I gits there."

"Why not take Nancy?"

"Nixie, Missus, it can't be did. His instructions wus to not let nobody know nothin'. An' I'm to tell Nancy youse goes to Chicago. If youse is boun' to give him another chanst, do it so as he can't have a word to say but that youse did what he says."

"Oh, Mickey, I don't know what I would do without you; you always know just what to do. Do you think I'll ever be able to repay you?"

"I don't never expect nothin' lady;" he looked at her for an instant, his heart in his eyes. "It won't ever be possible fer me to do everythin' I'd like to fer youse; I won't live long enough. An' lady, they ain't no pay in this world fer me. Look at me!" The long arms were lifted high above the shrunken, twisted body and a pleading face turned to her. "Look lady; did youse ever think that I might be like other men inside dis here cracklin' dey left me t' live in? Well, I is; an' lady, I knows they's nothin' in this worl' fer me, so youse needn't worrit none 'bout payin' me."

He was gone, a poor, little, limping figure with bowed head passed out of sight, and the woman who had been wholly absorbed in her own sorrow found a mother's love welling up in her heart for this one of God's children who had been grievously sinned against —was being sinned against. As she thought more of his suffering, her own occupied just that much less of her little world, and it was largely because of this new interest in her life that she was enabled to face the ordeal ahead as bravely as she did.

If she could have had assurance that society would accept the story of her betrayal, her struggle, her prayer and final surrender as a badge of honor, rather than the mark of shame; if she had not known that all the virtuous women, and the men attached to them, both married and single, whether virtuous or immoral, would point the finger of scorn at her, brand her with the "scar-

let letter" and leave her to rot on the highway; if she had not known this, she would have gone to her mother, to meet her first and greatest trial, hard by the gates of death. But, she knew. Oh, you dear good Christians (?) what did she know? She knew that unless she took home with her a man to whom she yielded her body on demand, and offered him to virtue as a reason for her condition, virtue would refuse to reason at all. And she, who came without the man, regardless of the wrongs man had done her, virtue would not hear; for, forsooth, without the man she must be unclean. How is this, good people? If a pimple-faced, disease-eaten, siphilized reprobate shall induce a woman to marry him, and she bring this disease-breeding pimple to you, my virtuous friends, and say, "This is my husband," you accept them and their relations and call them virtuous; yet are they not filthy?

Estella knew, and valued the wedding-ring Mickey bought her, because the very presence of that circlet of gold upon her finger would satisfy all beholders that she had a right as a wife to become a mother: would satisfy them, so long as she might be able to ward off their friendship, and its consequent inquisitiveness.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING CHARLEY.

Martin, the detective, and Price met at lunch one day when the latter had all but given up hope of getting Charles Harris back.

"You remember that Harris you sent me to hunt?" Martin asked casually, over the cigars.

"Yes, certainly, why?" Price was all animation in a moment.

"Well, he wasn't down in the country, never had been," the other announced, laconically.

"You reported that, I believe."

"Yes, but I haven't reported that I found him."

"Found him; good for you." Price reached out a hand.

"He wants him mighty bad. Ought to be some dough in this for Martin," the detective thought as he took the proffered hand.

"Well, where is he?"

"Down the line."

"Can you get him up here?"

"Sure thing, but it will cost money, and have to be handled diplomatically." He eyed the man across the table narrowly and hazarded a guess. "He don't love you any," he ventured.

"No," Price laughed. "No, I suppose not. How much will it take to get him up here for an interview?"

"I couldn't promise it short of a hundred dollars."

"How much for expense now?"

"Fifty."

"All right. Can you get him to-morrow? Tell him I made a failure of my machine and Holdon is willing to put up money to develop his invention—that will bring him hot-foot."

"No, I can't go until next week. But you don't need

to worry; he's perfectly safe where he is. I don't believe he's got money enough to get out of the town."

"That's good," Price commented as they parted.

While Price plotted the consummation of a long contemplated robbery of the worker, the man who had once had a "vision" was plodding the weary way most laborers travel. We may understand him better if we read a letter written home shortly after he located in Whiting, where Martin discovered him.

Whiting, Ind., ———, 19—.

Dear Mother—You will pardon me, won't you, for not writing you for a month, when I tell you that we have moved out of Chicago? And in the hurry and worry of moving, though we had little to carry with us, we didn't forget you, only waited until we could write and tell you that we had a fixed address once more.

Mother, I know your first question will be: "Why did you move?" So I am going to answer it right away. I had to, mother, mine. I could not go on working at a job where all my hopes were shipwrecked. Besides, there's every indication, so I hear, that there is to be trouble in the near future between the Holdon company and their employes, and you know I want to keep clear of that sort of strife, so it probably is just as well that I am not there.

Let's see, mother, mine, didn't I tell you in one of my late letters that I had hopes of getting enough money ahead this year to enable me to get my moulding machine made and patented? Well, mother, dear, my dream is shattered. Another man, a man with money and plenty of business ability, has a machine under way, a machine like mine, and it's all up with me. I have felt sort of lost since I found it out, and at first I was mad enough to have killed the man who had unwittingly taken so much out of my life. Of course it was foolish, mother, but I did feel my loss so keenly that I believe Mary was about right when she said I was just about crazy for a couple of weeks. Don't be alarmed, sweet mother; I have gotten away from the environment and am back to normal again and digging away as hard as ever, but with this difference: I have only to work my hands now; by mind is taking a sleep.

Seriously, mother, I am alarmed about Mary. She has never been the same since our baby died, and each letter she gets from her mother seems to depress her more and more. I can't interfere; you know I have not been on good terms with Mrs. Holcomb since she discovered that I was determined to bring Mary to the city. Besides this, there's the question of religion; Mary is getting more and more like her mother in this respect and charges all our trials up to our sins, and gives her mother's God credit for putting the mark of his displeasure upon us. Oh, how I wish we could have just a little of your sweet faith in our home!

Do you know, mother, I am sorry, now that it is too late to atone in any other way, that I ever made light of your faith. Somehow I seem to be able to call up your face as it used to look when I treated your charity work lightly, and I am sorry. But I couldn't measure and weigh then as I can now. Oh, mother, mother, a wife is not everything unless she be nine-tenths mother to the man. Mary is good, true, pure, and I love her. But you will never need to be jealous of her. Pshaw! I ought not to write such things.

We are settled in a little bit of a cottage down back of the great oil plant, where I found work.

Write me, care of general delivery. Guess they thought people who would live on our poor street did not need numbers.

I did one mean thing, mother, when I left the city. I ran away from Mickey Dougherty; you remember him, the little cripple I used to write about. Well, I ran away from everybody there. I didn't want a single link to bind me to the memory of my struggle. But it was downright cowardly to treat Mickey as I did.

Tell father I am hoping that money matters will be in such shape with me soon that I may be able to send you a couple of tickets to Whiting. Then, when you get here, we will spend so much money showing you the big town up the lake that it will keep me working for months and months before I can get enough scraped together to send you home.

When you go to sleep to-night, won't you give me one of the kisses I sometimes felt ashamed of, and just say, "God bless my boy?" We love you. Charley.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT VISION AGAIN.

"Hurrah, Mary, we're going back to Chicago and my machine is going to be built after all!" Charley, elated after his interview with Martin, bounded into the house like a boy.

"That machine again, Charley," the wife complained. "I thought you promised me never to——"

"There, there, Mary," he attempted to kiss her, but was pushed away.

"None of your trying to cozzen me into going back to that awful city."

"Mary, Mary, be reasonable," he pleaded. "Be reasonable; Chicago is no more a door to the bad place than Whiting is; and besides, Mary, the man who I thought had beaten me out in making a moulding machine——"

"Didn't you promise me?" she stood before him with an accusing finger uplifted. "Didn't you promise me that you wouldn't mention that machine again?"

"Yes, but I was without hope then," he protested.

"Charley Harris, mother was right; that machine was born of the devil," she began to sob hysterically.

"But, Mary, listen to me. Just think what it means if I can get this machine——"

"Don't! don't! don't!" she screamed, stamping her foot, and Charley, looking at her, wondered, rubbing his hand across his eyes, he looked again. "Was she really getting to look as well as act like her mother?"

"We won't say any more about it, sweetheart," he told her, as he sat at the table, his heart heavy.

The next morning when he did not start to the shop when the whistle blew its ten minute summons, his wife eyed him coldly.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Going to the city," he answered, whistling.

She had made no comment and lifted a pair of

straight, tight-drawn lips to meet his proffered kiss when he was ready to go.

"Poor little girl; between that old she imp of a mother and her own troubles and our poverty, she's had a hard time of it; but, she's got to get rid of the notion that devils invent machines and use them in the battle for human souls. I'll win her over and in a year from now she won't be the same Mary."

"It's just as mother said," Mary thought to herself, as she hurried with her little housework. "She said from the start that the devil had a hand in the building of that machine and would own any one that had anything to do with it."

Taking a letter from between the pages of the family Bible she sat down in the midst of her work to read again the last word she had had from her mother.

God's chastening hand is falling heavily upon your father, Mary. He's not as spry as he was last year, and don't go out among them wicked old sinners down to the feed store like he did. But he is gettin' stiff-necked again, a very man of wrath, and I shudder when I think what his end is likely to be. But you know I done my best to bring him to repentance, and would have, too, if that agent of Satan, your baby-faced, lyin', deceivin' husband hadn't come between us.

I told you jist how it would be; he'd either drag you down into a heathen life with him, or you'd have to fight for your soul, same as I did. I warned you that Sunday-made contraption of his was nothing but the works of the devil made manifest, and it is proved true, every word of it. You wrote me you was awful distrest when your baby died. Oh, daughter, lift up your eyes to the Lord; He sent it upon you as a punishment for leaving me to follow after a heathen and his gods of wood and iron. And how can you hope for the love of God and His peace while you live with a' idolator; and Charley Harris is a idolator. Didn't he say so? Says he: "I can see God in my machine," and that's idolatory. When you are ready to fly from the tents of the wicked, from the doorway to hell and all its abominations, and that's what Chicago is, write to me, and I will come and get you if I have to crawl.

Your mother, Martha Holcomb.

Carefully folding the letter, she replaced it in the Bible.

"He can choose between me and the machine; if he chooses the machine, I'm going home."

Had Charley looked in upon her then he would have been further shocked at the growing resemblance to the mother, observable in his wife as she went about her

work. From her father, Mrs. Holcomb had inherited a species of insanity and from him she had had long years of training in its culture. Her only daughter had inherited the same bent of mind and with trouble, death and poverty on the one hand and an openly irreligious (in any dogmatic sense) husband to fill out the measure of her limited vision, there is little wonder that Mary Harris put the narrowest of narrow constructions upon all happenings in her life, and charged all things that brought trial to the agency of the devil, forgetting the while to credit God with anything other than a purpose to let this same devil have his own sweet will.

"Come and get me; I'm ready to go home."

This laconic message was sent on its way the morning after Charley's visit to the city. And he, thinking his wife's silence argued that he had convinced her that it was folly to fly in the face of a Providence that offered to shower blessings upon them, went to his work with all the enthusiasm of youth pulsing through his body. He would give them notice to put another man in his place by the end of the week at farthest.

Better begin to pack up, Mary; we'll move next Monday. I rented a cottage about four blocks east of where we lived; got it from the same agent."

"I don't feel able to pack to-day," she had answered, and he went to his work, wondering if Mary was going to be sick.

He had never known her in but two stages, ready for all the work in sight, or ready for bed. The next day it was the same with her; she couldn't pack. He busied himself with odds and ends after supper, while she sat listlessly rocking, rocking, rocking.

"Something wrong with the girl; I never saw her that way," he commented, as he stopped work to look at her.

"I get off at noon to-morrow, Mary," he told her that night. "The new man came, and if you are not feeling well, you don't need to touch a thing. This is Friday, and by Monday I can get everything in shape."

When he returned at noon, a free man, he found the house in disorder, doors open and the breakfast dishes still on the table.

"Mary's sick," was his first thought; but, an examina-

tion of their rooms told him another story. "She's gone, gone without a word." He ran from room to room; then up and down the length of the lot. A neighbor stuck her head out of a side window.

"Looking fer yer wife?"

"Yes, yes, where is she?"

"I thought so; didn't I tell you?"

He stood mute watching the neighbor turn to some one in the room behind her; then she appeared again.

"An old lady came with an expressman 'bout eight o'clock, and they hustled two trunks into the wagon and drove off."

Another head appeared at the window.

"Rather suddent, wasn't it?" the last comer inquired. and Charley, without a word turned back to his deserted home.

"You fool, what'd you want to put your lip in for; you spoiled it all."

"I didn't neither, he was goin' anyway."

"He wasn't—he'd a-told me all about it if you hadn't butted in."

Charley Harris sat brooding over this new calamity for an hour. As he reviewed his life from the day he had determined to win Mary Holcomb's love to the present hour, he found but one flaw in his conduct toward the woman who had left his home without a word. He told himself, over and over again, that if he had not carried his troubles home with him, if he had only loved her more, this thing would not have befallen him. Yet, as he thought of those last days, a picture of Martha Holcomb in the body of her daughter haunted him, and to be rid of it, he plunged into the labor of packing his belongings. While at work he determined to move to the cottage he had rented and also to send his new address to his wife. If she wanted to return, the door would be open and his heart as well. In the meantime, he would work night and day on the machine; that would help him to forget.

So it happened that the next Monday found him installing his household effects in a south side cottage, while his wife, in her father's home, sat staring dry-eyed at the sheet of paper on which he had written the new address.

CHAPTER V.

A SPASM OF VIRTUE.

Snively sat with Fagan and Hilman in a back room, over the latter's saloon, policy shop, gambling house and free-and-easy. Fagan was biting her nails, while Hilman made Rome howl. Fagan had had her say, and had said it was the last word, but when Hilman, red and blinking, uttered his plaintive whimper, "Well, if we have to get the money—well, I won't put up again after this time, that's flat!" Fagan got up and shook a clinched fist at the cowering Dutchman.

"That's a man all over. Blow and bluster and damn things blue and then turn around and whimper like a whipped pup. You make me sick!"

Snively looked up and grinned.

"That's right, grin, you lying blackmailer. You know I don't dare to hurt you, or I'd take you by the throat, even if I am a woman, and choke the last grin out of you."

She turned to Hilman again. "You are the beauty I want to talk to. Here this go-between, Snively, who has had many a good job from me, comes and demands that I put up one thousand dollars to keep my joints from being pulled in the raid the goo-goos are planning. And you, you big slob——" the Dutchman did have manhood enough to cringe—"you told me a month ago to come to you if they tried to hold me up again for more than the monthly 'touch' and you'd help me."

"But, my God, woman, I have lost my pull, and it is two thousand dollars they want from me." He was red-faced and panting.

"Two thousand devils!" Fagan screamed. "You have money enough, why don't you fight?"

"We have money enough to fight some peoples, but not that bunch of grafters."

"Don't you think it will be just as well in the end if

you two give me your promise to pay? You're up against it. They can force you to pay or quit business." This was Snively's advice, mildly given.

"But, I tell you, I can't and won't pay it." Fagan persisted.

"But suppose a couple of countrymen were sent down to your place next week and you could clear up a couple of thousand on them. You'd do it, wouldn't you? And especially if I send a man to you, who will assure you that, whatever happens to the guys we send down, you'll be protected?"

Fagan got up, buttoned her coat and went to the door; both men followed her with their eyes. At the door she turned with: "I'd kill any man on earth for one thousand dollars. Send them along. Some day I may kill a couple for a whole lot less."

"That woman is a devil, Mr. Snively. She is a devil," was Hilman's compliment.

Snively laughed and asked: "How about our end of it, August?"

"I told you I can't pay no such money."

"Let's say that I agree to send enough customers here from the houses that will be raided to make up to you your two thousand dollars."

"Now, that's more like business; sure, I'll put up. Why didn't you tell me that at first?"

"I wanted to see the fun. You see, I've not had much excitement to-day, and I knew from past experience that if I got you and Fagan together and tried to make a 'touch' there would be excitement, and I needed the music, see?" Snively's eyes danced as he explained.

Now that Hilman knew himself to be in the good graces of the syndicate, he felt a load lifted from his mind, and still smiling, asked: "Who's behind this raid, Snively? I haven't seen nothing about it in the papers."

"No, and you won't see anything for a couple of weeks. Our people are organizing this raid, in anticipation of the annual opening of the gospel mills."

"What! you helping them preacher sharps?"

Snively's lips curled in scorn. "You don't mean to tell me you ain't 'on' and you in business all these years."

"I ain't 'on' to a damned thing but this, Snively," Hilman retorted hotly, resenting his visitor's open

sneer, "That through your representin' our side and Sullivan representin' the city, I'm held up every year for more and more of the profits of the business; and I ain't going to stand it much longer." He brought his big fist down with a bang that made the glasses sing.

Snively put his feet upon the table, lit a cigar and smiled at the ceiling, as he said: "Funny thing how you fellers that don't know the game squeal when you have to put something into the kitty."

"Well, if you have no objection, I'd like to know why I have to feed two kitties?" Hilman had lost his smile.

"No objection in the world, Hilman. Facts are, I want to tell you. It will keep you out of trouble; and some day you may feel like reciprocating." At an encouraging nod from the host, he went on. "First off, there's two sides to every question, some have three sides, and others have four. This business has four sides; the politicians, and the property-owners is one side; gospel sharps and goo-goos makes another; that's two. The big gamblers, sportin' houses and policy kings makes another; that's three. The pikers, porch-climbers and street walkers makes the fourth. Now you see all the cards in the deck and with your kind permission, I'm going to shuffle them." Hilman nodded. "Well, every so often, we've got to have a spasm, a regular goo-goo camp meetin' when all the papers hot-foot it after the politicians and demand a clean town with the lid screwed on. Before we got organized, there was nothin' to it but hell to pay and the fiddler gone with the dough, when the goo-goos got ready to shake us down. Why, man, when we didn't have lawyers hired by the year—didn't have no straw bonds, no detectives, an' no notice of them spasms, there wasn't no one to give even a square sport a show for his coin. Then we got pinched and ticketed straight through, and the mollies contributed regularly to the education of the goo-goo's children. But since we got our side organized, and own some smart legal sharps, there ain't nothin' to it. We just wear the goo-goos out in court by practicin' up-to-date law, and the mollies only has to contribute to the edification of the politicians. Now, the gospel sharps and good citizens can't be fighting all the other sides at

once and all the time, so they takes it in spasms. And we have it doped out to us, by side number one—that half belongs to us—that the good people are getting ready to throw another fit; that they've opened up the gospel mills for the regular revival campaign against the devil and all his works."

Hilman roared. Snively surveyed his audience closely.

"You seem to enjoy being touched," he observed.

"What, me? Not much!"

"Well, I thought you did, the way you laughed when I said they were going to throw another fit." He paused, but, as Hilman was all attention, went on. "It's their fit that's costing you two thousand bones, my duck. You see they are bringing in ex-thugs, ex-ball-artists, ex-horsethieves, ex-gamblers, ex-mollies and ex-anything else that can carry a tune across the street in a basket or exhort them in the real, old blowed-in-the-bottle fashion. And for a month there'll be hell let loose on the awful sin of being a sport. When the people that makes up side number one gets wise to the fact that the spasm's comin', why, they tips it off to side number three; that in order to hold the vote of the 'goo-goos' at the next city election there's got to be a crusade against side number four just as soon as them sky-pilots calls for it. And there you are."

"But I don't see yet where my two thousand dollars goes to," Hilman objected.

"You don't? Well, I'll be teetotally—say, you ain't a 'mutt' are you? Why, it's plain. Here's us; if them goo-goos was to get the action they wants wouldn't it wipe us off the map?" An affirmative nod. "Well, then, if we own half the politicians (and it costs money to own a politician, and you ought to know it), and a lot of the property-owners and some of the business men are milking us of good money on rents and other things, don't it stand to reason that they won't want to kill a good thing? Besides, there's lawyers, detectives, bondsmen, coppers, and God only knows how many more to pay. Now Hilman"—Snively took his feet from the table and looked his host straight in the eyes—"who's going to put up the dough to square things with them as has to be bought? And in the natural course of events, who's

going to be raided and have their layouts smashed? You see, Hilman, the good tribe are not going to come out of their spasm until they see some several dray loads of junk taken in a raid, and they won't quit prayin' for the wrath of God to take a whack at the town until two or three hundred suckers and a lot of cheap mollies are hauled before the law sharks. Well, when they sees this they throws up their hands and shouts, hallelujah, and comes out of it and shakes hands all around, telling each other what a great work they've done. But say, I could tell them suckers something. My advice to you, Hilman, is to get in out of the cold again. We'll take you in, and then, if we ever have to let them raid your place, you'll have the best lawyer we can find, and get paid for everything the police either swipes or breaks."

"I'm in, all right, and thank you, Snively."

"Oh, that's all right. Your place is big enough and your business, too. It won't pay you to stay out of the organization."

Amid Hilman's protestations of friendship and a desire to do something substantial for his friend, Snively departed. Hilman watched the receding figure a minute, then went back to his den to ponder over the revelation that had come to him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MILL OF THE GODS—STOPS.

Beatrice Holdon sat in her splendid home on ——— avenue, awaiting the arrival of a tardy lover, and the while Wetherby lounged in the card room of the Eagle.

"By the fumes," he exclaimed, "I most forgot my appointment with Miss Holdon."

"Going in for some of that sunny-faced old sinner's pile, are you?"

"Say, Gardner, don't you know I don't like the tone of voice you use when you mention Pater Holdon. You don't mean to insinuate that my future father-in-law is a bit of a rogue, do you?"

Gardner, with a front of Jove, handsome, hard and polished, smiled cynically as he put two hands upon Wetherby's shoulders.

"Never mind the old rogue elephant to-day, Wetherby. Just center your energies in loving the daughter; when you get her and need to know something that will open the Holdon treasure box to you, should the Hon. Horace prove a bit close, come to me."

"Say, Gardner," C. Augustus pulled away from the detaining hands, "I don't half like the look in your eyes, and I don't mind telling you I don't like the insinuation, but——"

"But, let me finish it for you, old man." Gardner touched the bell. "If what I know will serve you when the first golden shower has been assimilated, come to me and I will engage to give you the combination to Holdon's chest. But now you surely must go. The fair one should not be robbed altogether; that will come later."

"You're a devil, Gardner," C. Augustus declared as he took his hat, cane and gloves and turned to the door. At the portal, he turned back. "I say, Gardner, don't

forget that you promised to finance that little trip down to Pluto's Place for the twentieth of next month?"

When Wetherby had gone, Gardner turned his eyes from the ornate portal, saying: "I'm going to my room, George, don't bother me until dinner is served."

Sitting in a great arm-chair before a toy grate, consuming gas, while stolid iron pipes hidden away in elaborate trimmings supplied adequate heat, Jim Gardner, shrunken to the size his own estimation placed upon his present worth, thus questioned himself:

"Jim, I want you to take a good look in at your stock of chips and set your hold-out for this game. Yes, the stakes are high. C. Augustus Wetherby, big family, millions behind that name, and clean people, too; different on the Holdon end. I've got Holdon dead to rights, and the best of it is, he doesn't know it. And C. Augustus, once married, will be a mint. But wait a minute, Jim; is the game worth the ante? To play this hand, Holdon's daughter, who is a clean-limbed little filly, must be sacrificed for the stake. Wetherby's family, although they have millions and unlimited opportunities to do worse that take their revenues from legitimate business, are clean. They must be made to suffer, and they will suffer. C. Augustus, well, he wouldn't make good dog meat anyway. When I play with him—the little braggart—he makes me think of the woman who wrote, 'The more I see of men, the better I like dogs'—and he don't count. Do I need to do this thing? That's the question." Huddled in the depths of the great arm-chair, Jim Gardner reviewed the heavy penalties he had suffered, the added weight he had carried in the race, the purse hung up, being a place, food, clothing, shelter, and recreation in civilized society. While the clock, held aloft by a Grecian maiden in antique bronze, ticked off the minutes on the mantel above the grate, the man beneath checked off the years of his soul-eating struggle and winced and winced again, as crucial scenes on the film of life played before his vision. His hands, lying loosely on the arms of the chair, suddenly clutched the great leather tufts, his eyes grew hard and his figure straightened. Ah! There he had been hit hard. There had been a day in his life when, had he taken the other side of the street and met other than the men and women he

did meet, Jim Gardner would have been far from the depths of this chair to-day.

For a moment his hand passed nervously over his brow; the cold gleam of diamonds, those bits of hell-heated carbon for which women exchange their virtue and men, strong men, struggle like wolves, glinted on the polished face of the clock. As his hand passed back and forth across his brow suddenly he leaped from the chair, and shaking his clinched fist at the photograph of C. August Wetherby, he cried, "I will do it; I will! All the devils in hell shall not cheat me of this revenge!"

Again he sat in the soft fullness of the chair before the grate. "What am I that I should sit here crying into my own heart for the things I have lost out of my life?" he demanded savagely. "If these gold-plated pirates did not fear me; if I could not make good on a show-down that would put such men as the Hon. Horace Holdon into stripes, do you think they, the ultra respectable, law abiding, God-fearing upholders of the social fabric would permit me to live here and rob other men's sons? No! And by all the gods of Rome, no man shall stand between me and my accounting with this man Holdon. If brute force and fox-like cunning is the highest concept of which these men upon whom I prey have knowledge, if they will use me, the social outcast, the *one* man selected by the godly for hell's fiercest fires, to gain their ends in politics, to act as a connecting link between their Christian homes and the society of their mistresses, shall I be denied the right to put my claws into the vitals of the individual among them who—but, pshaw—Jim, You're making a fool of yourself. Some one said, 'It is not well for man to be alone,' and that is true of you. To be alone is to think of your wrongs. To think of your wrongs is to decide either to sharpen your claws or go jump into the river. Well, it will be the river some day, old man, but not until the tiger loses his taste for blood and his claws are inadequate to meet the demands of the jungle."

"Come in," Gardner called out, in response to a ring. George entered, and laying several letters upon the table at his master's elbow turned to go.

"Dinner in thirty minutes," he announced, and added: "I saw Snively—he said you were to remember

the meeting with the committee to-night at ——— Hotel, said the committee is afraid Sullivan is trying strong-arm work in the thirteenth. Snively said you ought to make it look big; said it would be safe to milk 'em to the limit; said he'd seen Smith and he promised to raise hell to-day in the twelfth."

"Here, old man;" Gardner laughed as he handed George a ten dollar bill. "You are the best ever. Tell Snively that I will see the Honorable, the Committee, and to-morrow afternoon the deal will be fixed between our enemy, Murphy, and ourselves. Tell him I'll see him at his place."

When George had gone, Jim Gardner left his chair for a second time and he appeared another man, erect, the fire of battle in his eyes, and the strong lines of purpose clearly marked upon an equally strong face. As he walked back and forth across the length of his sitting-room, he arranged his pawns upon the squares—the Municipal Campaign—two great parties struggling, two armies of honestly divided citizens, playing innocently into the hands of "Shifty" Smith, the prostitutes' angel, into the hands of Jim Gardner—we know him—playing innocently into the hands of Sullivan, the man on the other side—a combination of all the worse traits in both Snively and Gardner, playing innocently into the hands of great vested interests.

"I wonder what's in the mail?" Gardner asked himself, taking up one after another of the letters upon the table. A smile came to his lips as he gazed at the superscription upon the envelope in his hand. "Maggie, or I'm a piker." The smile broadened, and one might read in the face of this social wolf a trace of soul. "Maggie—I wonder what she can want now?" The envelope lies open upon the table, a hasty glance at its contents and George is summoned.

"George, is 'Shifty' Smith in town? If he isn't, I want you to find out where a wire will reach him. If he is, I want a letter taken to him."

"I could telephone him to come over."

"No, George, that won't do. The thing I want of him won't bear talking about; I want to put it in black and white and get his answer in the same shape. Go down and see if you can catch him."

As George left the room, Gardner picked up the letter again.

"Poor little Maggie, she, too, has carried weight, but up to now she has been close to the money all the time. It's a lie; I know the girl's as square as any on the turf. So Hogan got her—gives her the choice of being railroaded to the pen on the testimony of his hired witnesses, or accepting the queenship of his 5th avenue house and his dirty hogship thrown in as an alternative. Well, George?"

"Yes, I can get him; going to be here until after the committee meeting."

"All right, wait!" Gardner took up a pen and wrote:

A. Z. Smith:

Dear Sir—Hogan is assisting in prosecution of Margaret Benton. I want you to either write or tell him that, should he persist in this matter, you will see that he is cut off below the ears—make it plain. The girl is innocent, and his graft is to get her under his control as the price of his pulling out of the case. I don't care how you do the trick, *only do it to-day.* For political reasons, Hogan must not know that I have passed this up to you; I've got to work with him in this campaign. Give bearer your answer. Yours truly,

James C. Gardner.

The Honorable Horace Holdon sat in the parlor of his Paris hotel as he wrote the following letter, addressed to ex-Judge Carton, one of the leading members of the Business Men's League:

Dear Judge—Your letter of this morning fills me with apprehension. I have known for some time that the Democrats were prepared to take advantage of the seeming laxity of the present administration to make a grand-stand play for the vote of the discontented rabble, the anarchical Socialist labor element. I also feel with you that it would indeed be throwing good money away to finance a campaign with our present mayor and at least two of the other officers on the ticket. I also agree with you that "A Business Administration" is the very best thing we can offer against the cry of graft that Sullivan is raising against the administration. Your suggestion that I am financially, socially and religiously fitted to head our ticket does me great honor; the further suggestion that my name at the head of the ticket will give our party a prestige with the moral element that will put us on a plane above even the suggestion of our using the purchasable vote, while it is no doubt true, has in a measure overwhelmed me. I can only add, dear friend, that I place myself in your hands and assure you that I am ready to meet my pro-rata of the legitimate expenses of the campaign, in case of nomination.

Yours, Horace Holdon.

Three hours after the receipt of this letter, ex-Judge Carton had his private secretary busily engaged in getting out fifty letters, identical in all respects, touching the naming of the head of the ticket, but in personal pleas made to the several men addressed a wide divergence of reasons were advanced in order to insure their approval. To James C. Gardner he wrote:

Dear Gardner—I have succeeded in landing Holdon, late of the Founders' Trust, now a plain citizen, for head of ticket and have his promise that he will fill the barrel. I am writing to the others who gave me their pledge last November to stand by whatever I framed up to beat the Federal crowd in the coming campaign. I've fixed two other places on the ticket, one for the Provident Gas people, one for the "P. and A.," as the price of their influence in the convention. We want you to take charge of the *lower end* of this campaign, and with Holdon, gas and street R. R., to say nothing of the moral element we shall be able to *call*, you can have all the funds you need. We are bound to win. The people are ripe for revolt, and the only way to hold them away from the Socialists is to give them a goo-goo to vote for for mayor and a business platform. After it is all over, win or lose, come to me for anything you want and I will see that you get it. I can say this to you, because you know that I am not risking anything, either personal or political, in this fight. I'll tell you more when I see you. Can you meet me at the Eagle to-morrow at 2:30? Judge Terwill will be with me. Yours, J. M. Carton.

To a staunch Republican, he wrote:

Rev. J. M. Alexander, Pastor, St. John's:

Dear Brother—It gives me the greatest pleasure to be able to let you have a foreword of hope, relative to the coming campaign in this city. You doubtless recall our interview in November last, at which time I gave you assurance that I should give the municipal situation my most careful attention, and, if possible, so work upon our party managers that they would see the absolute necessity of placing next year's campaign practically in the hands of the best business men of the city. And as I am convinced that the vast majority of our business men are Christians, I trust that we shall have not only a business men's ticket, but a clean business administration, as the result of our November interview. I am pleased to announce to you that Mr. Holdon, of the Holdon Company, a leading member of the Methodist church, and a man who has never permitted his name to be used in any political connection whatever in city politics in the past, has consented to make the race for mayor, provided our party pledges itself to use none but clean methods in the cam-

paign. I am depending upon you to take personal charge of the campaign among right-thinking people in the churches, and especially amongst Prohibitionists. Mr. Holdon is, as you are doubtless aware, an ardent Prohibitionist. Of course, this will not be an issue in the campaign, but believing as I do that we must be both as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves if we are to successfully combat the evil influences in our municipality, I feel confident that you will know how to use the information here given. I suppose it is hardly necessary to add that we shall have to depend largely upon the free-will offerings of our Christian citizenship for funds for this campaign. I shall do myself the honor to call upon you Thursday evening, when we can more fully enter into the several matters that may suggest themselves to you, and would suggest that you see Judge Terwill in the meantime. Yours truly, Carton.

CHAPTER VII.

IN A TEXAS TOWN.

It is not necessary to our story to recount the happenings of the early days of Estella's sojourn in the city of Dallas. Suffice it to say that she has suffered and still has faith; has hoped against hope and is still unconvinced that the man who promised so much is utterly a bankrupt in moral sense. She did not know that Mickey had had two letters from Joel; the last more insistent than the first, in declaring that the deal was all off and that if the girl had any sense, she would understand the situation. Mickey had been sorely tempted to make a clean breast of the affair, but her pathetic faith in her baby's power to ultimately prevail upon the father, to give her the right to live in the world of good women, disarmed him. When both nurse and doctor were gone, and Mickey sat cuddling the little black haired daughter of his mistress in his arms one morning, there came to him a something that satisfied the hunger of his heart and for a moment even softened his hatred of the baby's father.

The door opened and Estella entered. Mickey, with face aglow, lifted a warning finger, at which magic sign the young mother, radiantly lovely, came up on tip-toe and knelt down beside the two.

"Isn't she just beautiful, Mickey?" The whisper came while the mother's eyes dwelt lovingly upon the sleeping babe.

Mickey lowered his head and answered with a great lump in his throat: "She's most like you, lady."

"And, Mickey, you believe James would love us if he could only see his little daughter, don't you?" This prayer for the sustaining power of another's faith was not read amiss by her knight as he looked into her pleading eyes.

"If he's a man, missus—if he's on'y half a man, he

can't in no ways help it." Under his breath he condemned that man to the very depths of perdition.

"I knew you would say so!" she exclaimed exultantly. "And now we must write James once more, and this time he will come."

The baby's eyes opened and a tiny hand reached out. The mother, on her feet in an instant, had the wee mite in her arms, close hugged, while Mickey sat feasting his soul upon the vision and swearing the while that he would bring Joel to them if it cost his life.

Two letters bearing the same date and the same postmark reached Chicago on the same day. Both were for the same man, but each bore a different address. Joel received the first at his hotel and as he read it he scowled, and cursing, tore it into bits and consigned it piece by piece to a cuspidor. The second letter was handed to him that afternoon at the Eagle. Joel sat a long time after reading this second letter without giving audible expression to his feelings. But if his face was a fair index to what was going on behind it, there was death lurking there for some one who had offended.

To learn the next step in this tragedy, the reader must scan closely the letter this man has read, as it lies open upon the table before him.

Dalas, Texas, Dec. ....., 19.....

Mr. William Manning:—Care Eagel Club, Chicago,

Yours afactionate—the missus is a wrighten to yo agin today. And she Wants yo to comb most owfel badshe has the sweatest little babby—say it is a Piech. Now I knows yo haint agoine to Comb kauze steller asks yo to, but yo Is a combin Jist the samee cause i ses combAn yo air agonter give her the one more chanst Shes bin a cryin fer—cause ef yo dont ime agonter comb ub strait to the Mertroplys an rayse Helle with yo—an yo knows i knows how to

yo don't need to think es how I am out ov coin cause I haint—i got 800 Iron dollyars in my close—an when I lyed to you bout a losyng de coin i done it cause I knowed yo was a Welsher an intented to do the Missus dirt—so yo see ime fixted fer yo

Now yo comb an comb P. D. Q. er we is combin to the Mertroplys an look up youse fokses—an i knows where to look, we ar a combing by Januairy fyrste—

John Williams,
yose Trule,
Mickey Dougherty.

Joel picked up the letter and read it a second time,

drew out a bill book, placed the letter in it and returned it to his pocket. He passed a hand across his forehead, muttering the while, "I might have expected it. The little devil! And he lied to me about the money. Much good it will do him once I get my hands on him. I've got to do it." Still muttering, he went to his dinner, and later joined Will Hammond and a couple of sports in a game of poker. In the small hours of the morning, when the "setting" broke up, he said to Will Hammond, "I'm beastly tired of this town and believe I'll start for the coast to-morrow or the next day; so I might as well say good-by. I'm not going out home, too busy; you say good-by to Bee for me, Hammond. So long, fellows."

'Tis said so long as one has life, there is room to hope for better things. And surely Estella hoped for better things, as with a mother's eyes she looked at her baby, and for the thousandth time told herself, James could not resist the touch of those baby fingers. With all the weight of her accumulated sorrows upon her those little fingers had twined themselves about the tendrils of her heart and lifted her even with their puny strength above the world we know, and full into the realm of exalted motherhood. Looking through eyes of love at the delicate lips, the bright, brown eyes, the dimpled hands of her month-old babe, she told herself again and again that even though the man did not love her, he surely could not refuse to do her justice for the sake of his wee, winsome daughter. Believing this, she sang once more the songs Mickey had heard upon her lips in a time which seemed to him to have belonged to another life.

While Mickey sat listening, the owner of the cottage and another man came around the house.

"What's the matter with you giving me enough dirt out of that hole you have been digging to fill up this old well," Mickey's landlord asked the other man.

"Nothing in the world, if you'll get it out of our way," was the reply.

"All right, I'll send a man up," the landlord began, when Mickey, anxious to get at something that would take some of his time asked—"Boss, couldn't youse give me th' job?"

"Why yes," said the man laughing. "I never thought of you; come down with me and I'll give you a shovel. How much is the job worth?" he asked the contractor.

"Why, if you was buying the dirt, and having it put there it would cost you a good bit; but, he can have one of our wheelbarrows, and he ought to get five dollars out of the job."

"That's all very satisfactory," Mickey announced, and went for his shovel.

Returning, he labored for two hours, and went in to supper, tired bodily, rested mentally, and ravenously hungry. That night as he looked down into the well and guessed its depth at sixteen feet, he concluded he would earn the five dollars if he ever filled the hole.

James Y. Johnson rode out of Chicago in a Pullman, bound for Kansas City, Mo. As Joel Holdon, he might be bound for the coast, but as Mr. Johnson, he proposed first to settle a little matter of domestic business this side of the Rockies. His only information regarding the whereabouts of those he sought in Dallas was a street address, and that tells nothing until one stands at the door and rings. He did not know that the little cottage in which they had taken refuge was fully a block away from any inhabited dwelling. He did not know that Mickey had strenuously opposed this and had begged Estella to take a flat down town, but she had insisted that this "last house but one" on a poor street was good enough, since James had twice quarreled with her because she had made friends with her neighbors. Here she would not have neighbors until he gave her a right to have them.

Arrived in Dallas, he went to a cheap hotel and registered as John H. Smith, Dennison, Texas. Paying for a night's lodging, he asked the clerk to direct him to the address Estella had given him. Mickey never thought of sending a street address.

"At this time of night?" the clerk inquired. "You ain't going out there; why it's past ten and it's right smart over a mile."

"Well, I'm going," Joel answered shortly.

"All right, you can't miss it; go two blocks north, then straight east. I used to deliver groceries out that way. The house stands by itself, there's about a block

on each side of it that's open. It's the next to the last house on the left hand side going out. You can't miss it," he called after the departing guest, then took Smith's suitcase and set it behind the office desk, remarking as he did so: "That guy sure does carry a Jim daisy grip."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MURDER.

"See, Mickey, she's wide awake as though it wasn't ten o'clock. Isn't she sweet? Do you want to go to Uncle Mickey?" Mickey laughed as he took the baby and began to hobble up and down the room while Estella put things in order for the night. When all was ready, she took the baby from his arms, laughingly said: "Good night, Uncle Mickey," and closed the door.

The boy sat with elbows on the table, his head resting upon his hands and his eyes fastened upon the door of Estella's room. Would Joel come and if he came what would be the outcome of his visit. These questions, and the answers that multiplied as he gave his mind to the problems ahead, held him motionless for a good half hour. Then he arose, locked the outer doors and went to his bed in the long, low room above. He was still speculating on the responsibilities and possibilities involved in his position when he heard a step on the board walk, then after a pause the gate in front opened and the steps came nearer and nearer.

Estella had taken her baby in her arms, and lay awake, dreaming of the coming of James. He could not resist the claims of their baby. He could not! If he should refuse to live with her, he would at least give her his name, if only until he could divorce her and thus protect their child. Still dreaming of her baby's future, still exulting in sacrifice of self, she was startled at the sound of footsteps upon the creaking board walk.

That step! Was it possible! Instantly she was upon her feet. Hastening to a window commanding a view of the tiny front porch, she drew the shade aside sufficient to admit a view of the porch.

The nocturnal visitor halted at the steps, and lighting a match held it high, as he scanned the door for a number. At sight of his face in the flickering light Es-

tella gave a glad cry—"Oh, James! James!"

The man turned his eyes upon the window, while she, mad with joy, had thrown open the door of her room, then the front door, and stood in the darkness of the hallway, trembling and sobbing out her relief.

Joel entered to be clasped tight in the arms of the woman he had wronged so grievously.

"I knew you would come, James." She sought his lips and he, bewildered by this unlooked-for welcome, submitted in silence. "I knew you would come, and now you poor, tired dear, I am going to show you our treasure before I do anything else for you. Why, James, she is so lovely, and she does resemble you."

Unresisting, she led him into her room, and left him to turn on the lights. When the lights glowed, and she turned back to him, she halted and looked in terror at the face of the man. Timidly she approached him and laying a trembling hand upon his arm, asked—"What is the matter James? You look—you look—are you ill?"

And the man, his heart filled with hatred of this woman, because, forsooth, she seemed bent upon preventing him from having his own way, even at the fearful cost of her life and the future of their babe, stood with the stamp of man's worst passions clearly defined in every feature. He had not spoken a word since he entered the house. She, standing rigid before him, read in his face the doom of every hope, and as she tottered back, her hand fell upon the warm body of her child. Like a current of fire, this contact sent hope surging back to reinforce her reason. Quickly bending over the child, she clasped it in her arms and kissed it.

Joel watched her as she bent over the bed and his heart hardened.

This baby was a fetter for his limbs, and so long as Estella and Mickey lived it must ever be a nightmare to take a thousand hateful shapes, tormenting him with the possibilities of exposure.

In that long, low room above, Mickey had bounded from his bed at Estella's first cry. Then when he heard her voice in the hall he knew that at last his prayer had found answer and had brought with it his hour of supreme trial. He hurried into his clothes and hastily gathering his little hoard of money, started to leave the

room, fully intending to hide out until Joel should leave.

The mother lifted the babe in her arms and turning held out her offering of a new life and it's wondrous possibilities to the man. "Take her, James, take her and may God help her to win your love." The pathos of her plea, the renunciation of self, were all lost on the infuriated man.

With the quickness of a tiger, he clutched the baby and with an oath, flung it blindly from him. The mother, reading death in his eyes, flew at him with a cry of mingled rage and terror. For a time, he sought only to keep her from harming him, but as she persisted, the devil of unbridled license took full control of his faculties, and he began to push her back until she fell across the bed. His hands had settled in a grip upon her throat. As her eyes began to protrude, and her struggles grew weaker, the demon whispered to him to end it all, all.

Mickey heard the mother's cry and the wailing of the baby he loved as he halted at the head of the stairs before seeking safety in flight. That cry was all that was needed to bring back the courage that in his mill days had often pitted him against those, who, because of physical superiority attempted to abuse him. With set lips and a face red with the rich blood of a righteous purpose, the boy ran back to his attic room and slipping into his pocket the revolver he had taken once before when he went to meet Joel, he bounded down the stairs.

The door stood ajar and the first glimpse Mickey got of the interior showed the baby in a huddled, now silent heap upon the floor. Without a thought of the others, he darted in and catching up this, his one legitimate love, the one affection of his poor, starved life, on account of which he need not feel ashamed, he turned facing the bed, and all the pent-up wrath, engendered during his months of slavery to the man, found utterance.

Joel turned his head to meet the angry eyes of the cripple.

"You little devil; your time has come!" he cried as he sprang at the boy.

Mickey had forgotten that he held the baby when he saw Joel choking the mother, and as Joel sprang at him, he attempted to dodge, still holding the baby. Joel,

blind with a murderous passion, saw nothing but the boy and in his mad pursuit frustrated his own ends by reason of his haste. Overturning the center-table in an effort to remove it from his path, he stumbled, and Mickey, throwing the baby upon the bed, darted from the room with Joel at his heels.

The cripple had read the same message in the man's blood-shot eyes that the mother had read for her child —death! Forgetting for the time that he held the key to life and death in his pocket, in fear of his life, he started back through the sitting room. The madman behind him, had almost clutched him at the entrance to the dining room. On through that room, the panting cripple, now fully possessed of the terror of death, raced for his life. The kitchen was reached, and only then did Mickey realize that he was trapped. The door was locked, and the key hung upon its accustomed nail. The moment necessary to secure that key and that other moment necessary to unlock the door, would never be his. Turning from the door to double back, he felt the hands of the pursuer upon him, then his hot breath, as he bore the weaker body to the floor. Mickey, like any other animal, however weak, when facing death, fought desperately; while the man, intent only upon the accomplishment of a fixed purpose, worked to fasten his hold upon his victim's throat, regardless of the scratches and blows rained upon him. In the struggle, Mickey suddenly put one hand down to his side to give him leverage to lift himself, and relieve his body of the grinding weight of Joel's knee, it was then his hand came in contact with the revolver. The mind acting with the rapidity of light, the twisted body heaving upward from the hips, lifted the weight of the man. The free hand drew the weapon, and pressing it against the body of his adversary, a bullet speeded to its work. The grip of the hand upon his throat relaxed, the body above him settled down with a little shudder of twitching muscles. The breath of his enemy came in a sigh to his ears, and was stilled. How long he lay half smothered beneath the weight of the man, Mickey Dougherty will never know. In the reaction that followed his deliverance from death, he lost consciousness, and lay as one dead.

But life and its perplexing problems will remain to

all who fight death, until he shall finally conquer. So, Mickey awakened to life; to a realization of his crime, if crime it be. Yet his first thought as he shudderingly struggled to release himself from the dead weight that held him, was for the woman and her babe.

Shaking with terror of the thing he fully expected to find in that front room, he hesitated even when he had reached the sitting room, and stood leaning for support against the table, every faculty strained to catch a sound of life from the room before him. He remembered that he had found the baby lying upon the floor. He remembered that it had not moved in his arms. Was it dead? He had seen Joel's cruel fingers upon the delicate throat of the mother. He put his hands to his own throat that pulsed and throbbed with pain, where the same fingers had sought his life. Was she dead?

"I must, I must, I must," he repeated with ashy lips. But it was long before his fear of the coming day finally drove him to action.

His mind made up, he rushed into the room, then halted. Sitting upon the edge of the bed, with eyes that still protruded and seemed dulled with pain, hair disheveled and night robe torn and bloody, Estella stared at him.

"Thank God she's not dead," he whispered.

Then seeing the tiny heap on the bed beside her he cried: "The baby, the baby." Taking the mite in his arms, he ran to the light.

"He killed her, and it's just as well." Estella spoke without emotion.

"She's alive, she's sure alive; her heart beats."

The mother came staggering from the bed and held out her arms.

"She hain't hurted much, just stunted like," Mickey assured her, as he placed the little bundle in her arms.

Without a sound, Estella turned back to the bed and lay down with the baby in her arms, while Mickey stood trembling with a new fear in his soul.

"They goes bughouse fer lots less dan she's gone through," he told himself, as he stood waiting, waiting. But, the mother did not move, and Mickey, remembering that awful thing in the kitchen, went slowly back, clutching his revolver. A thousand terrors lurking in

the darkness halted him upon the threshold. He could see Joel's murderous eyes peering at him out of the blackness; he lifted his revolver and the specter danced away, then came nearer, and as he pointed the revolver again with a muttered oath, the eyes vanished. Backing to the dining table, his eyes ever on the dark outline of the doorway, he turned on the light and in an instant his fear of bodily harm vanished.

The man he feared was no longer able to cope with the weakest life cell in the world. He lay face down upon a thick woolen rug, and Mickey, no longer a prey to fear, went boldly into the kitchen, turned on the light, locked the door behind him and sat down to meet the greatest crisis in his life, alone and unaided.

"Of course they'll hang me," he cast reproachful eyes upon the body. "An' I wouldn't care t' be hanged fer killin' a man, but you—youse never was nothin' but a Johnny. Youse never was, an' youse come here intendin' to kill all of us. Youse knows youse did—and I don't want t' be hung fer no sich dirty welsher. An' I won't! I won't!" He jumped from the chair. "I'll t'row him in th' old well an' tell missus he's gone; that he beat me an' then left."

Fairly reveling in relief at thought of this sure deliverance, he set about his task.

"They do it at th' works, an' it's jist as fair fer me," he argued. "An' they's one thing I got ter do—an' dat's take everything offen him; so if any one ever does dig him up, dey won't know who he is." Suiting the action to the word, Mickey removed the papers, bill-book, watch, rings and jewelry from the body and did it as unconcernedly as though he were working on an every-day job.

His long years in an industry wherein death is almost a daily visitor among the workers had made him callous and thoughtless of the value of human life except where it touched his friends. Johnson, the workman, killed in the Holdon Company's plant, had been such a friend.

The woman and child for whom he had risked his life, he loved.

This thing with its still snarling lips and bloodshot eyes, he had sworn to kill if he harmed Estella, and

"They ain't no priest ner sky-pilot goin' t' say a word t' God fer youse, an' God knows I ain't."—Page 371.

his only wonder as he stripped the body was that he had not thought of the revolver as he went down-stairs in answer to Estella's cry and shot the brute as he stood over her.

Having removed all he could find that might serve to identify the body, he unlocked the back door and after taking a look about to assure himself that there was no one to discover him at his labor, he returned to the kitchen and extinguishing the light, began the task of removing the body. Taking the rug by two corners, he pulled its burden to the door, then down the steps, and across the grass plot to the edge of the well.

"There, Joel Holdon," the panting boy exclaimed; "see what youse got fer being a low-down cuss! They ain't no priest ner sky-pilot goin' t' say a word to God fer youse, an' God knows I ain't. Yer jist a-goin' t' be buried like th' dog that youse are.'"

With a mighty heave, he sent both body and rug to the bottom. Then he began the labor of covering the grewsome thing. With shovel and wheelbarrow, the boy worked on in the dark until he was satisfied that the body was well hidden, before he went back to the house.

Creeping noiselessly to the front room, he opened the door and peeped in; then entered and approached the bed. Estella was asleep, but the baby was crying.

"Poor little kid, I guess I'll have ter let youse cry till th' missus wakes up," he told the baby, then left the room to take up his vigil. "Four o'clock an' I ain't hardly touched th' bed, an' I don't dast to now fer fear I might sleep too long." He spread the contents of a paper bag of loot, taken from Joel's pockets, on the little table in his attic room.

"Now I wonder what's in this here bill-book. Gee whiz! Yallerbacks an' five hundred dollar ones, an' one hundred ones an' a bunch of fifties. Ain't they no little ones? Yes, they is, here's a wad of little ones. He had these here in his pants pocket." He looked over his shoulder into the shadows, bit his lips and looked back at the pile of bills before him. "Ain't I a fool," he exclaimed. "He's got his, plump through him, too, an' 'sides, if he was alive, they ain't no way in th' world he could climb out of that hole, an' here's me

as has seend all kinds of stiffs, a-lookin' in corners expectin' to see him. Huh!"

Busily, he counted and recounted the bills and coins he had dumped upon the table. "Well, if I can't count it, I reckin it's enough," he mused, replacing the large bills in the bill-book and stowing the smaller ones in his pockets. "Now, what's in them letters; if they's anything 'bout missus er the kid, I reckon I ought to kind a-know it." Picking up one, he took it from the envelope. "Female, by crackey—an' she's in Oakland, Calif.—that's' Colorado—no California. Miss Ethel White, now what's he a-doin' t' this here one?" Slowly he read the letter, then with the exclamation, "He needed t' die," threw the missive on the table. "An' he was a-goin' t' th' coast t' marry Miss Ethel White an' they was a-goin' t' Europe, an' he told her he's a-bringin' a sparkler along, fer she says she is countin' th' days till she sees that sparklin' gem he is a-bringin' her. Wonder if it's in this!" He picked up a flat package, neatly wrapped. "Gracious snakes, ain't they th' beautifulest ever," holding up a string of pearls from which swung a beautiful diamond pendant, his eyes devoured their beauty. "An' this is th' ring—my, it's swell, an' cost—it must have cost as much as a hundred bones, an' all of these was fer Miss Ethel White, an' nothin' but his fingers fer th' neck of th' woman what loves him like a dog!"

Throwing the gems back upon their satin bed, he closed the case with a snap. "Them's fer his baby, an' nobody don't get them away from me less I'm dead."

"Well," he went on, after a time given to speculation as to the outcome of it all, "if I am t' know what all them papers stands fer, 'fore I puts them away fer keeps, it's me t' work."

At five o'clock his task was finished, and as the herald of day threw his beams of rosy light over the east, Mickey went softly down-stairs, peeped in at the woman upon the bed, then went out to renew his labor upon the old well.

CHAPTER IX.

SHE WANTS AN ANGEL.

"He meant to kill us! Oh, my precious baby, he meant to kill us!"

"She's all right in her top piece," Mickey whispered to himself as he stood without the door.

"And I've slept and left my poor half killed baby to cry its little heart out."

"That's the stuff. Long as she's a-thinkin' ov th' kid, she's all right." He started to leave the room.

"Mickey, oh, Mickey, are you up? Has Julia come yet?"

Mickey turned back and thrusting a tousled head into the room answered, "No, missus, Julia isn't here. It's on'y six o'clock."

"Where is he, Mickey?" A wild look of remembrance, of terror, convulsed her face. Mickey allowed himself but an instant's gaze into the woman's eyes; the something he saw there, akin to hate and fear and pain, dumfounded him. Those were not his Estella's beautiful eyes. His eyes fell, and with white trembling lips, he muttered to himself, as he clutched at the door-jamb for support:

"She is batty, she is. Oh, my poor missus!"

"Where is he? Tell me, is he hiding behind you?" She sat up, holding the baby to her breast. "Ha, ha, ha! You thought my baby was dead—but see—I, I saved it. And when the time comes—" She nodded her head and smiled with hideous swollen lips. "When the time comes——"

Mickey could endure no more. In an instant he stood beside the bed.

"You go straight to sleep, missus," he pleaded. "They ain't nothin' to be excited over. He's gone, gone, I tell youse, an' he won't come back."

"Won't come back? Why, Mickey, I want to show him the baby."

Mickey, distrait, changed his tactics.

"Yes, he's gone, an' he told me positive when he left, to pack up sudden and hit the grit for Chi."

"Why suddenly, Mickey? Everything seems to go around and stop, and then go around again—suddenly? —Mickey, what does it all mean?"

"It means that as soon as we gits t' Chicago, you can have anything youse wants, missus; anything in this world youse wants."

"I want to make my baby an angel, a beautiful white angel with long wings, so she can help me into heaven." The mother looked questioningly at him.

"Can I do that?" she demanded, now scowling.

Mickey shrank back affrighted at the thing he saw in her face.

"Sure thing, missus. Dey's a reg'lar angel factory in Chicago, they makes 'em over, jist as youse wants 'em."

"Tell me about it, Mickey—tell me how they make angels."

"Some other time, missus." He backed to the door. "Some other time. Now I got to git things fixed so's we can git t' that angel factory. You take good care of th' kid—th' baby, missus, else she won't do fer no angel."

"Oh, God Almighty—what can I do? She's crazy as a dope fiend widout dope," Mickey said to himself as he sank into a chair by the table and buried his face in his hands.

In the bed room, a disheveled woman sat upon the edge of the bed beaming down into the upturned eyes of the babe, who, after satisfying its hunger, lay staring into the face above it.

"I'm going to make an angel, a beautiful angel of my baby, and then it can come to me in the night and sit on my bed and let me feel of its great white wings." She kissed its lips and stroked its hair, as she went on. "That funny twisted little man knows where there's an angel factory and we're going straight to it."

She arose and placed the baby snugly among the pil-

lows, saying, "Now sleep, precious, it's to be mother's guardian angel."

* * * * * *

"Julie, did youse ever hear of Chi?"

"Where are—what am Chi?"

"Chi? Why, that's the short fer Chicago, the greates' mertropolis in th' whole world."

"Not more bigger as Houston, I reckon."

"My girl, youse could put twenty-seven Houstons into Chicago, an' she'd holler fer a couple ov St. Louises to finish out her breakfas' on."

"Lord, I'd like to see dat town! Got any colored folks dar?"

"Got any? W'y, say, Julie, Chi is de place where colored folks blossoms. W'y, say, girl, spouse youse was there broke to-day, in six months youse 'ud have on glad rags and be flashin' real gems. Well, I should say there is niggers in Chi."

"I'd gib a heap to see dat town. I never did see but jus' one colored pusson from dat town, an' he certingly was 'bout the gayes' proposition ever."

During this speech, Mickey was eyeing the girl keenly. He had determined that a nurse would be necessary on their trip North, and he wanted to take Julia for two reasons. She was practically the only link that connected those in the little cottage to the rest of the town, besides, she had been with them long enough for him to believe she could be depended upon. Drawing a wad of bills from his pocket, he displayed them before the eyes of the astonished girl.

"Lord, boy, where you get all dat money?" she demanded.

"W'y it grows in our fambly, Julie. I carries all de dough for dis establishment, an' when youse wants money, Julie, jist talk to me. Now I wants t' know was yer kiddin' w'en youse sed youse wanted t' see Chicago, 'cause if youse wasn't, w'y I'll take yer 'long with the rest of us. We moves next week."

"Course I wants to see it near. Reckon I hain't got no ambitions? I hain't none of your low-down trash."

"All right, Julie, it's a go. An' say, when we gets settled in th' city, I'll give youse a hundred plunks extra."

He counted the bills off his roll and held them before her eyes. "A hundred plunks extra, if youse do as I tells yer whilst we is a-gittin' there."

"All dat money and my wages, too?"

"Sure t'ing, I ain't no piker," he protested.

"Golly," the girl chorused, "I ain't goin' to wait no six months after I hits dat town 'fore I puts on my glad clothes."

* * * * * *

"Fo' de Lord, man, come in and see what ails missus." Julia's frightened face appeared at the back door. Mickey straightened up from his task at the wheelbarrow and ran to the house, pushing past the colored girl, who stood trembling in the doorway; he ran on to Estella's room.

"Stop it! Stop it t' oncet!" he screamed.

The woman looked up, smiling. "See—doesn't she look funny, see how her tongue hangs out and her eyes roll?"

"I thought youse wanted to make an angel of her." He took the baby from Estella's lap and she offered no resistance. "Here, Julie," he called, and when the girl came haltingly into the room, he put the baby into her arms. "Run into the back yard an' see if youse can't git some breath into it."

"Didn't she look funny?"

Mickey looked into the smiling face and sickened. What could he do? The mother demented, the baby in constant danger of death and he loved both with all the love of a starved soul denied other outlet for its passion.

"Oh, missus, you mustn't never do that no more. We wants to make a' angel outer th' baby." An inspiration came to him, "an'," he explained, "missus, if you was to kill it, choke it that way, why it 'ud turn inter a devil an' haunt youse, haunt youse," he repeated as the mad woman hid her eyes and shuddered. "Youse mustn't hurt it. We can't never make no angel of it if it's hurted."

"I've seen a devil." Estella caught him by the arm and gripped it until he winced. "He looked like this," her face took on the murderous look he had seen Joel wear as he bent over her, "and he choked—choked.

Do you know him?" she demanded, staring into his eyes.

"I knows him. If—" Mickey twisted out of her grasp—"If youse don't want th' devil t' come back an' choke youse agin, don't youse hurt that baby no more."

"It isn't my baby, you funny little twisted man. It isn't my baby," she sat down laughing.

"No, it ain't your baby. I knows that, but we kind of got to take it 'long t' Chi so t' get it made inter a' angel, ain't we?"

"Oh, yes, I had almost forgotten—I do so want an angel."

"Course youse do, an' didn't I steal this here baby purpose t' take, an' isn't it goin' t' make a beautiful angel? But don't youse choke it no more er I'll send th' devil back. Youse mind what I say." He left her sitting there repeating, "I'll mind. I'll mind."

He went out to find Julia working over the baby.

"Man, am dat woman crazy?" she demanded. "If she are, I don't go to no Chicago, an' dat's a fac'."

The baby lay whimpering in her lap, while a sorely perplexed philosopher walked the length of the room. As he walked, Mickey debated whether or not he should tell the girl the truth. In the end, he constructed a compromise. The girl watched his every movement keenly, eaten with a desire for the things she dreamed the great city could give her, a city in the land where her people were really free. She still had a great dread of crazy people, and was ready to bolt at the next alarm.

Mickey halted in front of her. "Yes, she's crazy as a bedbug to-day." The girl nodded. "We had a doctor in th' night an' he says she'll—she'll be all right agin as soon's we gits her home. She's bin through a' awful lot of trouble, jist when her man is t' come, we gets a message last night that he's killed—an' that puts her off her trolley, see?" Another nod from Julie. "Now this medical guy, he says fer us t' pull our freight t' oncet—hit th' grit an' git her back home an' she'll be O. K." He heard a step and turned to see Estella with her arms outstretched.

"Oh, there's my precious darling," she sobbed and threw herself before the frightened girl.

Mickey went from red to gray, from gray to white, as the mother took her baby's face in her hands. With a cry of anger, she turned to him; "See! see!" she shrieked, "see where his cruel fingers caught her throat! My God, he tried to kill her, and he her father!" She sprang from her knees, her eyes sane and burning with an awful purpose. "Take me where I can but put my hands on him, Mickey—as God is my judge, I'll kill——" she staggered and fell headlong to the floor.

"Quick, Julie, quick, let's get her to bed. She'll be all right when she comes out of it; th' doc sed it would be this here way."

CHAPTER X.

LETTERS AND COMMENT.

Paris, ——, 19——.

Dear Mamie—We are living in regal splendor. Everything the finest. You will doubtless remember that I had some doubts when I started out on this world-seeing expedition. I was ever so little afraid that my Angel wouldn't stand to be milked—but, the Lord bless you, when I curl up 128 pounds of live woman in his lap, put my arms around his neck and play with the lobe of his right ear—why, child, he gives down gold, bank notes, diamonds and pearls as a Jersey gives creamy milk.

Take my word for it, Mamie dear, every mother's son of them—the men—have a spot the tickling of which will surely hypnotize them. My Old Iron Angel's vulnerable spot is the afore-mentioned lobe of a big, outstanding red ear.

He's chucked the iron business and we are going into retirement. Keep the house intact, Mamie, and hunt for the lobe of a rich right ear—but get one that is nice and lays close to the head.

Some day my longing for the fleshpots of home is going to overcome my avarice—and when that day comes, steam won't be able to carry me fast enough.

Mamie, I wish you would find out what Jim Gardner is doing, and write me. I laughed at you once because you said the man you loved could do anything he pleased with you—even after he had deserted you. Well, I won't laugh any more. Write me about Jim.

If the Founders' Trust don't fail in the meantime we will reach Italy and be doing Rome by the time this reaches you.

If Florence is having trouble with her lungs again, give her a hundred, tell her to give Shifty the slip and take a rest. Yours, with love, Fly.

Chicago, ——, 19——.

Dear Flo—Your Paris letter came through all right and the envelope looked like some of the suit-cases once-overs are so anxious to show us—all stamped up on both sides and ends. I'm glad for your sake that the Iron Angel is liberal—I haven't discovered the right lobe as yet—guess they are built differently.

I intended to write you a week ago, when something happened. I'm not going to tell you the story, but must tell

you that I have taken a whole family, father excepted, into your establishment. And one member of that family owns us all—even Big Jack, the new janitor—the old one is sick. Well, Jack has surrendered unconditionally. You'll know more about it when I tell you what Jack, as black a fellow as you ever saw, said after his surrender. "Miss Mamie," he said, "hain't dis a 'culiar place t' hab er baby in hit?" His big eyes stood out and he looked as solemn as a judge. "Course I hain't a-meanin' no disrespec' t' you-all, but hit do seem mighty 'culiar—I hain't neber seed no babies round a house like dis heah," he went on—there, it's out, and I feel better.

You will remember that crippled little Irish fellow, Mickey? Say, he's pure gold—and all the way through. He brought the baby, her mother and a colored girl all the way from Texas, and plumped them in on me. When he told me how hard pressed he was and the awful things both he and the mother had been through, and added that if you were at home there wouldn't be any talk of the mother having to leave the house until she was able to take care of herself—well, I surrendered, first to the baby, then to the mother. The colored girl only stayed two days, when she was whisked away by one of her own tribe, and we haven't seen her since.

Flo, when you come home you may fire them, but you want to hurry or you won't see the mother. She's going to die. Now, tell me that you would have done just as I did. They have plenty of money, so I judge the man in the case must have been rich.

Now, a word about Jim. I had Snively up here and pumped him dry. Jim took to plunging as soon as you left town. I believe I told you that before—anyway, he made a killing, and has been playing in big luck ever since. He's bought stock in some telephone scheme and is trying to put it through the Council, though what he can want to put through is more than I know, and Snively only looked superior and intimated that too much knowledge would be a dangerous thing when I asked him.

Snively swears Jim has not looked at a woman since you left—and if he has made a pile, you can guess he has had plenty of opportunity to forget his troubles.

Sure, I'll keep the house warm for you, and I hope the good news I send you will cause you to forgive me for taking a family to raise.

Come home and I'll tell you the third of a long story. Estella—that's the mother—will tell another third if she's alive and in her right mind, but the most interesting part of the story will doubtless be contributed by Mickey. With love,

Mamie.

Chicago, ——, 19——.

Dear Brother—You will doubtless be surprised at receipt of this letter, but I feel it my duty to write you upon a very

delicate subject. I trust that you will understand the spirit in which I write. I also hope that you will heed my suggestion and return home as soon as possible.

Well, I suppose I have at least succeeded in awakening something of curiosity in the region from which you draw your amazing business ability, even tho' you are a man. So I might as well go straight to the point and have it over with.

Beatrice is in *grave danger.* I intended to convey in the underscored words all that I mean, but I find that I have failed. She has gone beyond my control. Frankly, brother, she has surrounded herself with a set of advisers who are dangerous Socialists, labor agitators, a female doctor, and a couple of old-maid schoolma'ams who have undertaken to mother the world. I have done my best to bring her to a realization of the nice distinction that must ever be drawn between the aristocrat and the mere laborer. And what do you suppose her reply was? "Why, Aunt Nell, I thought you were the radical of our family." The women of my family are given credit with being quick to turn a speech, but I must confess that for once I was nonplused. You will laugh, but I didn't; neither was I able to explain to Beatrice's satisfaction. I fear there is somewhat more of a chill in your home than the condition of the weather warrants me in feeling. I sincerely trust that your return will not be long delayed. Joel came home not long since, looking troubled, and I having this letter in mind, sought to get a little information from him touching his business, but to little purpose. He seems morbid. Now, brother, you doubtless are surprised that I am objecting to Beatrice's taking up with things I once loved to orate over before women's clubs and certain other "functions," but if you will think back you will doubtless remember that I was rich in those days. Besides, the entertaining of an avowed anarchist Prince was a bold piece of originality; while to talk the "brotherhood of man," "the golden rule against the rule of gold," or have a choice bunch of reformers on one's bounty list was the very height of eccentric originality. Yes, brother, I paraded my reforms, tried to tame the revolutionists and pull the fangs of my anarchist Prince, but all the time I realized that they and their brood were not numerous enough to be dangerous. It is different to-day, and therefore I am different. So Beatrice believes me a hypocrite, and I am distressed. I would add a whereas and a resolution or two to this if I were not afraid that you would laugh at me even after your return. Physically, we are in splendid health. I must add that Beatrice seems to be enjoying her flirtation with the red revolution to the limit.

Yours in trouble, Nell Bishop.

The Hon. Horace Holdon, Paris, France.

As this letter indicates, Aunt Nell was acting a part when she received her title of "Radical," and she could afford it then. When her husband had lost his millions

to some craftier speculators, and she was forced back to a position in the ranks of "poor relatives" hanging in economic uncertainty upon the skirts of the so-called respectable world, she could no longer afford to play with "radicalism" and even "reform" was unsafe. It is, therefore, little to be wondered at that Beatrice, who moves only as her conscience prompts and is constantly educating that conscience to examine more closely the principles involved in the problems that confront her, should come to detest this shallow woman who has played with the fire of truth while living a lie.

"Have you no faith in the working people?" she had asked her aunt one day, shortly after her arrival, and after they had had some little argument.

"Faith in them, child! Why, certainly, I have faith in them. They will work to-morrow and I will both drive and eat."

"Oh, aunt, that sounds so brutal. Where did you learn it?" Beatrice had asked, and she long remembered the expressive shrug, her only answer.

CHAPTER XI.

ANNOUNCING THE COMING OF MR. WM. ABNER.

Joel Holdon had been dead but a week when a letter arrived at the office of the Holdon Company—a letter that had been forwarded from the Eagle Club. Price looked at it, and noticed the return which gave an Oakland, California, address, then thrust it into a drawer and forgot all about it until two days later, when another letter carrying a special delivery stamp was handed him by a messenger. He looked at the address, then at the return, and thought of the letter he had put away. Instructing the messenger to go to the Holdon residence, and take both letters with him, he dismissed the matter.

That afternoon he was called to the phone and after a time returned to his desk muttering: "It's funny how some young fellows with money manage to stay in one place over night. Now, this Joel is certainly a peach, and to hear his sister tell how anxious she is about his whereabouts one would think he had never done a thing in the world but write her letters."

Four days after Price had talked with Beatrice over the phone another letter came to his desk, bearing the Oakland return, and this time directed to the Honorable Horace Holden. Price turned it over in his hands, and at the same time turned it over in his mind. What would he do with it? Evidently the party who wrote it wanted to be put in touch with Joel, and if he forwarded it to Holdon it would finally come back to him for answer. Why not have it over with at once? He would—— When he had read the letter he threw it on the desk and sat with his face in his hands for a time: "Now what in the name of all the saints could have happened to the fool. Wonder if he found some other woman on the way out there and ran off with her? It would be just like him. Guess I had better call up—

no, that won't do. There is no use of having her worrying about the chump. Guess I had better put Martin on the case. Then write a full explanation to Holdon."

The politicians in the world of "Big Business" had known for some time that the Honorable Horace Holdon was to withdraw from activity in the affairs of the trust he had helped to build up, and would stand for nomination as their candidate for mayor, and use that office as a stepping stone to things higher, but Price knew nothing of it. So the announcement that Mr. Wm. Abner, of Cleveland, Ohio, would arrive within the week to take full charge of the Chicago plant, and also take up the duties of the presidency, came to him as a bolt from the blue.

On the heels of this announcement came a letter from the Corporations' Protective Association that fairly scorched the paper upon which it was written. The letter informed the reader that, as they had been unable to get anything approaching satisfactory replies to their letters for several weeks past, they had, upon notification of the election of Mr. Wm. Abner to the management of the Chicago branch, furnished that gentleman with a full and detailed report covering their relations with the Holdon Company, and he had promised a thorough investigation upon his arrival in Chicago. The letter closed with the statement that the three men who had been sent to the Holdon Company had prepared a supplementary report, and this had been placed in the hands of Mr. Abner. The intimation being that they had informed Mr. Wm. Abner that they considered it both unsafe and unwise to trust anything of a confidential nature to the Holdon Company while he (Price) was in charge.

He was still smarting under the lash wielded by the caustic secretary of the "Protective" when Martin was announced.

"We've run the last clue to earth, Mr. Price, and as far as we can find out, Joel jumped off the earth at Kansas City," was the detective's salutation as he took a chair.

"Did he go there?"

"Oh, yes, he went there all right. He registered at the Grand, but he left the hotel within a day and dropped out of sight. Our people are still on the case, but we ought to have some one on the ground who knew him. If he was done for it was a slick job. You don't think he put himself away, do you?"

"Not him," Price declared. "He was having too much fun; besides, he was to have been married."

"Another woman in the case?" Martin asked quickly.

"There may have been a dozen—but not one," the other replied seriously.

"Then that's all right. But say, we can't go much farther without all the facts. When can we have them?"

"I'll have to consult another party before I can tell you," Price affirmed, and closed the interview.

"Now I'm in a devil of a hole," Price informed himself as he sat at the desk after Martin had gone. "Confound the man who said wheat couldn't go down. Confound the wheat pit and all the rest of it! And here, before I have any chance to make good, a new president is to be dumped in on me. Why in blazes didn't Holdon tell me? Did he want to catch me napping? The next thing will be to check me up, and when that is done I can see my finish. Damn that Corporations' Protective. If it has any weight with him, I see where I get out, even without their looking into the books. Another nice thing for this Mr. Abner to get hold of is my settlement with the unions, and their growth in this plant since Holdon left."

"By ——, I'll do it. And when I get him here I'll paint millions in the picture of the Harris Machine I show him. I'll hold this new president off until Holdon arrives; pad my expense account enough to let me out, and finally hold my job through my pull with the Honorable himself. Wonder if I hadn't better put another thousand on wheat this afternoon. It ought to come my way once in a while."

* * * * * *

Mr. William Abner—a self-made man of fifty years, without unnecessary luggage in the way of flesh, and

with a superabundance of self-esteem, stick-to-it-iveness, egotism, and a general, all around opinion that he had earned his promotion to the head of the Founders' Trust by the application of almost superhuman talents—arrived at the offices of the Holdon Company one bright winter morning.

"Please take my card to your superintendent," he commanded the young man who happened to be the first to catch his eye.

The young man, Moses Webster, read the card, as he slowly made his way to Price's office.

"So that's the new president. Looks starchy enough," was his inward comment. Without a word, he laid the card on the desk.

"What? Eh—so soon? What's he like?" Price stammered as he caught the name.

"Looks like the finished article," Moses replied soberly.

"Well, show him in."

After the formalities were over, the new president plunged into a cross-examination of the superintendent, at the conclusion of which he announced his program.

"I never trust any man, Price, and I believe I owe my success to that fact. I was not born in Missouri, still I have to be shown. You admit that you have made confidants of your foremen; that a clerk in the office is in possession of practically all the secrets of the business. You wouldn't have needed to tell me that. The report of the Protective Association makes that clear.

"Why, man alive, under your management, this business would belong to the men inside of six months. Do you know what the devils did to the men sent out here from the Protective Association?"

"I have guessed," Price answered in a low voice.

"Guessed? Don't you know?" Abner asked, contempt sticking out of each word. "Well, I'll tell you. They were half killed by the union sluggers, and their reports show the unions could never have caught on, except through a leak from your office. Now the first thing I am going to do after I have our auditor check you up, will be to fire all the confidants you have in the plant, also the confidential clerk. How soon can you have

things in shape for the auditor?" he demanded, switching the subject suddenly.

"Why, why, not until Mr. Holdon comes," Price managed to say.

"Not until Mr. Holdon comes, and pray tell me, what Mr. Holdon has to do with my checking up this branch of the business?"

The new president's assumption of superiority came from his lips, but it emanated from his whole person, and to such a degree that Price lost his temper.

"It strikes me," he retorted, "that for a stranger, you assume too much, even though you are to manage this business."

"That will do, that will do, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Price, if you please."

"Price then. You have been superintendent of this plant quite too long already, and your impudence, sir, your unwarranted impudence compels me to anticipate by several days the date I had fixed upon for your removal. You may consider your services here at an end."

Mr. Abner stood to deliver the last half of his speech, and made it impressive by an all too evident anger.

Price sat white and cool. He knew that the outcome of the game he played depended upon two factors, Holdon and time.

"And suppose I refuse to turn this plant over to you, until I am ordered to do so by Mr. Holdon?" Price reached for a cigar.

"Suppose you do," Mr. Abner's voice rasped, "and again, suppose you don't! My man,"—he shook a threatening fist at the superintendent—"your bluff is an insult, an insult, sir! I am president of this whole industry, and manager of this individual plant."

Price nodded. "Exactly, but it happens that Mr. Holdon's interests cannot be protected if I turn the business over to you to-day, and as he has not notified me to put you in charge, why——" He smiled up at the dapper, little man. "I must decline to comply with your request. I would strongly advise you to defer to my wishes in the matter."

"I shall see our attorneys, sir. I strongly suspect something crooked here," the little man fumed.

"And tell them that the superintendent refused to let

you play bull in the china shop with this business," Price sneered. "Do so by all means. They will tell you that I am the manager of this plant, and am well within my right, when I refuse to turn the business over to you or any other man."

"But I tell you, I was elected manager of this plant, and I propose to manage it."

"You forget that your election would not stand a test in the courts any more than would the Founders' Trust. I do not forget, and my duty is plainly to protect the majority stockholder's interests here, until such time as he relieves me of the responsibility."

Price's attitude of virtuous solicitation for the interests of the powerful Mr. Holdon began to take lodgment in the mind of the new president.

"I declare, I declare," he ejaculated, seating himself. "This is an extraordinary situation. You really mean to tell me, the president, that you will not allow me to assume control here until Mr. Holdon authorizes you to do so."

"Exactly, Mr. Abner," Price faced the little man, "and when he does, you can check the business up, and begin firing—commencing with me, of course," he added.

"Well, well, well, I've been in business for years, and thought I knew every kink and turn in the game, but I've learned a new one."

"Would you care to visit the plant and get acquainted?" Price questioned, convinced that he had won his point, and sensible of the fact that to press it too far, might result in shipwreck.

"Why, yes, I suppose I might as well. When will Mr. Holdon arrive?" Abner asked as they got up.

"I cabled him a week ago, and expect him within two weeks," Price replied, and they went to the shops.

* * * * * *

"Arrive in New York, 20th. Telegraph news.

"Holdon."

Price and Charley Harris were seated in the rooms over "Shifty" Smith's, when Price produced the above telegram, and said: "I wired him to meet me here upon his arrival, and I will want you to be here to explain our work to him. And Harris," he added, "make it strong. He took a fancy to you at first, and would have tried

your machine out then, if I hadn't had mine in my head."

Two days later Price made a hurried trip to the little machine shop where Harris was working on his machine.

"He'll be in to-night at eight o'clock, and I want you to come up, come up the back way about ten o'clock."

He looked about the shop for a time, then stood watching the mechanic at his work.

"How's she coming?" he asked, idly handling a pattern.

Charley turned a beaming face to him. "Coming along nicely, Mr. Price. In two months at the outside, I can have it ready to turn out a mountain of castings a day."

"That's good, that's good. Just keep the pace," he encouraged, "and you'll land a millionaire."

"Confounded lucky thing I tumbled onto old Holdon's political aspirations," Price told himself on the way back. "If he won't fix things at the plant on the strength of this machine, he'll have to fix them to save himself a little bit of annoyance I might cause him by putting certain parties next to his European trip, and some of his property holdings downtown. Oh, I guess he'll come across all right. Then Mr. Abner can have his management. I'll take mine along with politics and this new moulding machine."

The Honorable Horace Holdon reached Chicago on schedule time, and after a flying trip home, went downtown, in spite of the protest of both Aunt Nell and Beatrice.

"Well, Price, how does everything look? Your wire frightened me. I can't think what that boy could have done with himself, and I didn't want to come home for two months."

"Having a good time?" the superintendent inquired.

"A good time," Holdon leered across the board. "Never had such a time in my life. But about Joel," the magnate's face showed concern.

"You'll have to go to Kansas City. That's the last word from Martin. I sent him down there a week ago. I've done everything money could do."

"When do they expect me?"

"As soon as you can go. I took it upon myself to

inform the agency that you would be there day after to-morrow. And they——"

"Say that's rather—well, I suppose I had best know all about it as soon as possible."

At this point, Price proceeded to tell Holdon how he had taken funds out of the Holdon Co.'s safe to meet the detective's charges, and then, apparently as an after thought, said: "And by the way, that Harris moulding machine has taken a pretty penny, and of course, I took that out of the safe, too."

"How did you square things with Mr. Abner?" Holdon inquired with interest.

"I couldn't; could I, without exposing your connection with the Harris deal?" Price looked depressed.

"No, that's so, and, great guns, man!"—Holdon was excited.

"Oh, I fixed it all right," Price interrupted, but with a long face.

"Fixed it with Abner—why that prying, long-nosed fox. Say, I'd rather have Sherlock Holmes on my trail than our president."

"Well, when I tell you how I fixed him, you can let your mind rest." Price pulled at his mustache.

"Well, out with it."

"I bluffed him out."

"You didn't bluff Abner?"

A look of unbelief mingled with mirth, sat upon Mr. Holdon's countenance, as he regarded his vis-a-vis.

"Yes, I did. He demanded that I check up, and get out, and I as flatly refused to do so until you should come, and relieve me. Told him I was protecting your interests, and wouldn't give up my position as manager until you released me."

"Say, that was great. How did he take it? Stormed, didn't he?" The magnate seemed to relish it hugely.

"Well, yes, you might say he stormed, and it's been deuced unpleasant for me."

"Oh, we'll fix all that," Holdon beamed. Tomorrow morning we'll turn the plant over to him, and I'll leave you a check, payable to Mr. Abner. If I am not back from Kansas City by the time the auditor gets through. He's here, isn't he?"

"Yes, he got here the day after Mr. Abner arrived, and they are both as mad as wet hens," Price answered, with a light heart.

"Well, as I was saying, I'll leave a check, and when they get the cash figured up, you can fill in the sum of the shortage, and explain that you drew it out for my private account, while I was in Europe. That will fix it."

"The very thing, and do you know, I never thought of that, or I would have turned the office over to them, and told them that you would draw a check to cover the shortage."

"Didn't think of it, eh? Well, you did very well as it was," Holdon commented, well pleased that Price had held out against the redoubtable Abner and the auditor.

The sound of footsteps on the back stair claimed the attention of both men.

"By the way, Mr. Holdon," Price hastened to explain. "I thought you might want to verify my statements regarding the Harris machine by having a talk with Harris, so I asked him to come up about ten o'clock, and I guess he is coming."

"Price, you made a mistake there." (A knock on the door). "Hurry and tell him I didn't come, anything to get rid of him." Price showed his bewilderment, and stood looking helplessly at his employer.

"Hurry, man! Don't stand there staring."

The door was opened a crack, and Price put his face to the opening. "That you, Harris," he whispered. "Well, I'm sorry that you had the trip for nothing. He didn't come, and I have a lady visitor."

"All right. Happy dreams," Charley replied, and moved away, but as he passed the window, and noticed that the shade was not drawn quite to the bottom he stooped and looked into the room.

"What sort of game is this?" he muttered, as he caught sight of the Honorable Horace Holdon standing at the farther side of the long table. "He lied to me—I wonder why?"

"Is he gone?" Holdon inquired in a stage whisper. Price put his finger to his lips, and turned to the door.

He had been listening, and failing to hear descending footsteps, concluded that Harris was still at the door.

Harris could not see Price, but from Holdon's attitude and looks concluded that they suspected him of eavesdropping, so he tiptoed to the stairway and made an unnecessary amount of noise as he went hastily down.

"He's gone," Price whispered, taking his place at the table.

"You should not have had him come up here; not to-night anyway. One man is enough to be mixed up in the business, so in the future steer him clear of me. I don't want to see him, or have anything to do with it until we are ready to close up the business."

"Very well, if you say so, but you know I've been telling him, just to jolly him along, how pleased you would be."

"Well, you can tell him to-morrow that I've gone to Kansas City, and when I get back you can tell him I'm too busy to see him. I'll leave this matter entirely in your hands."

"But how about it, if Abner fires me, and I suppose he will."

"Why? Oh, I see, because you bluffed him out. Well I'll take care of you. You've certainly got nerve, and I'll need a good man to look after loose ends, from now on. Don't worry. I'll look out for you."

When Holdon left, Price sat for a long time, thinking of the tangled skein of life, thinking of the knotted snarl that had been straightened out so easily that night.

"Confound it, I might as well take ten thousand more," he said aloud, "and I will, if he gives me that check, as he promised. What's the difference?" he demanded of the wine bottle, "by the time he gets the check back—if he sees it at all—I'll be so deep in his confidence, and he'll be so deep in politics, that he won't dare to peep. And won't that little piece of congested self-conceit, our president, get a surprise at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, when Mr. Holdon walks in, hands me that check, and orders me to turn the plant over to Mr. Abner. Well, I should think so."

The next morning at the appointed hour, Mr. Holdon was announced, at the close of a very unpleasant half hour

for his superintendent, who had been hard pressed by both Mr. Abner and the auditor, who wanted to finish his work and get away.

"Mr. Holdon, I'm delighted to see you, delighted, because if anything had kept you from appearing here in person, I am satisfied that your very excellent superintendent would have compelled us to go to the courts, before he would have turned the business over to us." Mr. Abner ended his remark with a very peculiar smile in the direction of Price.

"Quite right, quite right, Mr. Abner. I assure you he did just what I would have had him do. Protected my interests as he saw them."

Mr. Holdon was not averse to posing, and he surely played it up very well, as he pulled out his bill-book, and extracted the promised check. "There, Mr. Price, if you have used any of the firm's funds for my private account, and I conclude that you have, just fill in the amount and turn the check over to Abner."

"Thanks, Mr. Holdon," Price replied, while Mr. Abner and the auditor stared. "I suppose I am released from responsibility, and that Mr. Abner and the auditor are to consider themselves in charge."

"Exactly, and gentlemen—" Mr. Holdon turned at the door, "I must beg your pardon for a hasty leave-taking, but I am called to Kansas City. When I return, I shall want a business talk with you, Mr. Abner."

Fingering the check, and smiling blandly, Price turned to Mr. Abner.

"My dear sir," he said, "you are now in full possession of your office, and I desire that your first official act shall be the acceptance of my resignation as manager and superintendent."

"Not until we have checked up the office," the auditor interposed.

"As you will, gentlemen. If not now, then at your pleasure."

His eyes were on the oblong bit of paper over which he drew the fingers of his left hand, vaguely wondering what Holdon would say when he next saw it.

Within an hour after Holdon had left the office, Price had drawn another ten thousand from the funds of the

firm. As soon as he had the money deposited in another bank to his credit, he entered into the work of the auditor with a vim that surprised that astute official. But it would not have surprised him could he have known that Price wanted the work finished before Holdon returned from Kansas City, in order that he might get the check out of his hands.

"You are thirty thousand dollars short, ten thousand of it drawn yesterday." The auditor looked hard at Price, and Abner gasped, "Thirty thousand dollars short. So that's"—but he got no further.

"Gentlemen," Price began, "I am agreeably surprised. I thought the amount would touch close to forty thousand. You see," he looked at them unblinkingly, "Mr. Holdon has several large business interests. When he went to Europe he gave me charge of some of them, and I drew from this firm's account occasionally, simply as a matter of convenience, as was the case yesterday."

He got up, and taking the balance sheet from the auditor, remarked: "I suppose you have no objection to my having your figures verified, before I fill in this check for the amount necessary to balance cash?" Without waiting a reply, he took the sheet out to Moses' desk, and asked him to check it up and bring it back to the office.

While he was out, the auditor stepped over to his desk; picked up the Holdon check; looked at it closely, and remarked: "Mr. Holdon evidently has implicit confidence in Mr. Price."

"Oh, that doesn't necessarily follow," Abner replied.

Then Price returned, and busied himself at his desk, sorting papers until Moses came in.

"The footings are correct," he announced, laying the sheets on Price's desk.

Without a word the latter drew the check toward him, glanced at the figures, wrote in the amount, and handing the check to Mr. Abner, said: "With my compliments, and my resignation."

At this moment a messenger entered and handed Price a telegram.

"See Judge Terwill to-morrow without fail. Letter follows. Two clues.—Holdon."

"Letter follows, does it? Well if that letter contains the things it should, I'm all to the good with the Honorable Horace Holdon. I'm to see the Judge. I wonder if he is behind Holdon's political ambitions." Price folded the telegram, put a few personal belongings in a grip and left the offices of the Holdon Company, without a word of farewell to any one.

CHAPTER XII.

AN IRON ANGEL.

Florence, Italy, Jan. 20, ——.

Dear Mamie—My Iron Angel has gone, and by the time this reaches you he, too, will be in the city by the lake. He didn't insist upon my accompanying him, though he did show every sign of emotion at parting, and, really, I felt mean when I thought how I had written you of his outstanding red ears.

He certainly came across in handsome style before he left me, and I have since excused myself, to myself, for loving him half to death after he gave me the draft on a bank in Rome. And he didn't even ask me to be good while he was gone, not a word. Just told me to go ahead and see things as we had planned. But, really, I am tiring of the endless procession of good clothes on foreign backs, gold braid and shining swords on local dignitaries, and the endless, endless, ever-pressing, ever-changing, yet always the same mass of fantastically rag-clad, begging poor. The money in my pocket fairly burns to be spent, and every attempt I make to spend it is met by such bold-faced, smiling, wheedling, cajoling liars and extortioners that I end up by refusing to part with any of my coin.

I long for Chicago, the city of a million wonderful things. And if this gnawing home-hunger keeps up for another week, I'm going to come; in fact, I feel now that I am coming to go.

Your family cares do not worry me at this distance. If your conscience, now in the sere and yellow leaf, upholds you, I have nothing to say at this distance. The Lord knows the house is big enough, but a baby? A baby in a house where no child has a right to abide by any law written or unwritten, a baby, Mamie! But there, I dare not judge; when I come home we will take your Mickey and your mother, and your baby into executive session and decide their fate instanter.

So Jim plunged, made a stake, went into business, and is now turning his matchless talents to account in politics. Mamie, the one trait I admired above all others in Jim Gardner was his honesty—*he was square* with men. I doubt very much whether he can retain his honesty and succeed in Chicago politics. But, anyway, I was glad and sorry; somehow all my joys are half of sorrow. You didn't mention May in your last. Is she better or worse?

If you need money, don't be afraid to ask for it; or have you still a few dollars left? Your homesick Fly.

To this letter Mamie replied:

Dear Flo—We have been living with death in the house for two weeks and he has taken his victim at last.

Estella had not been here a week when she became so ill that we felt compelled to call a doctor, your doctor. He gave us no hope. The strangest thing about her was that she denied that she ever had a baby, denied it from the day she was taken sick. And do what we would, she persisted that the baby could not possibly belong to her. I sent for Mickey and he said she had been the same way in Texas and suggested that we keep the baby away from her. When the doctor made his first call Mickey was here, and I told the doctor Mickey could tell him all about the case; and whatever possessed him I don't know, but he asked the doctor if she was going to die, and I thought he would faint when the doctor said, "Yes, there isn't a single chance for her."

Then the doctor asked him if she didn't have a baby, and Mickey said she had, but they had left it in an orphans' home in Missouri, and I sat there and let him lie. When the doctor was gone I asked why he had lied, and, would you believe it, he said if he had told the doctor the truth he would have had some old hen or other taking the baby away, *and he wanted it and would die before he'd let anybody have it.* Did you ever hear of the like?

I had made up my mind to tell the doctor, and I guess my looks must have given me away, for Mickey actually went down on his knees and begged me not to tell, and I promised. So we have been hiding every trace of the baby, and the doctor don't suspect a thing.

Long before this reaches you we will have had a funeral from the house.

I wish you were here to help me, to advise just what to do now and afterward with Mickey and the baby. The colored girl they brought from Texas has gone.

Later: Mickey brought me a five-hundred-dollar bill, and asked me in a matter-of-fact way to get it changed for him. When I looked at it, then at him, and sat absolutely speechless, he looked at me a minute as solemn as a judge and said:

"I wish Fly Boyd was here. She'd know how to help a feller without all the time a-lookin' like she wanted to call in the bulls."

Well, I took that bill up again.

"It's good, all right, and I got plenty more; enough to keep the baby an' make a lady of her. Are youse goin' to get it busted for me?" he demanded, and I still sat there like a fool.

Finally, I came to, and promised to get it "busted" for him. But, what do you think of it? I do wish you were here. Mickey would tell you the whole story; I might pump until doomsday and get nothing but a string of lies out of him.

Still Later:—I went to Jim Gardner's office (yes, he has a swell office now) and asked him to break the bill. Say, he turned it over and over. He's dead in love with you, Flo. He thought he knew where it came from. "Holdon's money, is it?" he said, and looked frightfully wicked. I don't know what I said, but he asked: "When did she get home?" And I wanted to know who? "Why, Fly; didn't she come with old Holdon?" He nearly bit my head off. When I said: "No, she didn't; she's in Florence, Italy. Want to send a word over?" he started to say "yes," then changed his mind and changed Mickey's bill. Yours with love, Mamie.

P. S.—I must tell you how our visitor died, Flo. I must.

Yesterday morning when the doctor came out of her room we stood huddled at the door. I started to enter the room and he caught me by the arm. "Don't go in; her knight-errant is with her. Let him have her all to himself these last few minutes. Come," he added, "let's sit down; I want to ask you about her. I've done all that can be done."

When he and I were seated in the big front parlor, the doctor asked: "What do you know of this woman?" I related the circumstances of her coming to the house, and he said:

"I have met with some strange experiences in my practice, but never with a case like this. That Mickey knows more than he has told me, I am satisfied; but that he does not know her name, I am sure. They tell me the love of woman passes understanding, but in this case it's the love of a man, a big-hearted, whole-souled man in a fearfully abused body, that passes understanding. I wish I knew her name. My certificate of death must be made out, and it must bear more than the name of Estella."

Just then Jane came downstairs sobbing. We ran to the door. "Oh, come, she's dying!" the girl cried, and started back.

When we entered the room the doctor ran to the bed and lifted Mickey, a dead weight, from across the body of the woman he had loved, loyally, honorably, faithfully, while he might serve her. Gently we laid him upon the divan, and the doctor paid a man's tribute to a man when he wiped his eyes and went back to the bed.

"Dead," he whispered.

Mickey struggled up and sat wild-eyed, looking first at one, then another of us, as he said: "She's dead; but she knowed me. She knowed me." Great tears rolled down over his cheeks. "She said, 'Mickey, I'm so glad he didn't kill youse.'" The words had hardly left his lips when he realized what he had said, and, shaking off his emotion, sat staring straight before him.

The doctor turned to him. "Mickey, won't you tell me her name?" Mickey started and sought the doctor's eyes, a troubled look on his face.

"I don't dare t' tell youse th' name she ought to have, Doc; an' afore God, I don't know her other name."

"Did she never tell you her name? She's dead, Mickey, and we must know her name."

"Doc, I asked her;" he gulped down a sob; "asked her what her name was afore she met him, an' she begged me never to ask her again, till he married her, an' he never did."

"But I must fill out a burial certificate, and I must have another name."

"Ef youse must, Doc, w'y not give her my name? It won't matter none to her when she's dead, an'—an' I was all she had in the worl' to th' last." He got up and, feeling blindly for the doorway, left the room.

Do come home, Flo. Come as soon as ever you can.

With love, Mamie.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LETTER HE WANTED.

The second letter that came to Price from Kansas City made him wish he had taken twenty, even thirty thousand more from the Holdon Company's cash.

Dear Price—You will have seen the Judge by this time. Write me what he had to say.

I wouldn't write this letter, but I may start for Texas to-morrow. The agency thinks it has a new clew leading to Dallas, so I am uncertain as to where I will be at this time to-morrow. A. M. White, of California, is here with two detectives on our case. Joel was to have been married to his sister. I want you to put a good man on the back track in Chicago; I want to know what he (Joel) had been doing for a year. I don't like this agency; they seem to be pulling my leg and giving me nothing in return but pipe dreams.

Now, about that Harris business. I want you to have each piece of the machine duplicated, with the changes in shape of patterns and in the driving mechanism, as Robinson suggested. Have Robinson sign over all rights in the machine to me. Pay him whatever you have to. I enclose draft. Get the rest of the drawings of Robinson's machine to Washington as soon as possible; better send them down one at a time, so Gridley can be fixing up our claims. And don't forget that every scratch that goes to Gridley goes under Robinson's name. This is important, and Gridley understands it; I saw him in New York.

Keep Harris jollied along; better give him a few hundred out of that draft. Tell him he must not let a soul see the machine; that he must not even whisper of its existence to any one. And be sure that he keeps at work. I want to get this business closed up before spring. Ask the Judge to put you in touch with a fellow naved Snively, also a Jim Gardner. We will use both of them in the next campaign.

Destroy this. H. Holdon.

"Destroy it? Well, I don't think." Price laughed and shook his fist to the west. "Destroy it! I hope to God they take you to Texas and keep you there a month. I'll have enough letters in that length of time to cinch my hold upon you, my dear next mayor of Chicago, that I will."

"Hasn't Mr. Holdon come yet?" Harris asked, in a matter-of-fact way, as Price stood at the bench watching him at work.

"No, and what's more, I don't expect to see him for some time. He went through to Kansas City, but I had a letter from him. He sent you two hundred dollars and is anxious that we get the machine set up for a test as soon as possible." Price laid a check for two hundred dollars drawn on his bank on the bench. Harris picked up the check, looked at the signature, then at Price.

"What's the matter with it?" Price asked.

"Oh, I suppose it's good, but I thought you said Holdon sent it."

"So he did, but as I had other bills to meet, he sent a draft to cover the full amount and I am checking it out."

Harris watched Price closely. "I'd like to see that letter," he was thinking, even while Price made his explanation.

"Have you made the drawings for the moulding mechanism?" Price inquired, running over some drawings on the bench. "If you have, I'll take them to the pattern shops. We want to make all the speed possible."

"I haven't finished them." Charley's voice was hardly audible. "I'll get at them again to-night," he added.

"All right, Harris; be sure and have them ready in the morning. I'll be out after them." He went over and looked at the machine, growing piece by piece, then left the shop.

As soon as he was gone, Charley threw down his tools and ran to a window where he could see Price as he went toward the car tracks.

"I wonder if I am a fool! Anyway, he lied to me once, and why not again? My God! If they should try to rob me now after all my labor; after firing my hopes and lifting me out of hell into heaven. If they do," he shook his clinched fists at Price as the latter boarded a car. "If they do, by the eternals, I'll be the last man they rob." Back to the bench he went, muttering to himself: "I'll pretend that I couldn't finish the drawing and see how Price takes it. If I have a

single doubt left to-morrow, I'll take the work to some other pattern maker."

The mechanic worked that day under a pressure that promised a nervous breakdown in the near future. As he labored, his suspicions of both Price and Holdon grew and he determined to shadow Price and finally secure an interview with Holdon and get from him something more substantial than Price's word before he completed the machine.

For three days he held Price off with the statement that he had been unable to finish his work on the drawings for the moulding device, and each day, as Price became more persistent in his efforts to get the drawings, Harris became more fixed in his belief that there was something more than a desire to see the early completion of the machine, behind Price's evident anxiety.

"Let's see, this moulding mechanism and the formula for the moulding compound about finish the parts our patent claims will cover, don't they Harris?" Price asked on the fourth morning when Harris had told him the drawings were still unfinished.

"That's about all," Harris admitted and went on with his work.

"Well, I wish you would hurry them along. We want to put this machine to the test at the earliest possible moment, and if it will do the work you claim for it, we ought to have all our patent claims worked up and be ready the day the machine proves a success, to fire them into the patent office," Price insisted.

"The machine will do more than I claim for it," the inventor spoke with conviction. "And, I'll get out the drawings, never fear. I'll work day and night to get the machine set up, but—this side of the test, Mr. Price, I've got to have my interest, a one-half interest in all patents, put down in black and white."

"I thought we had settled all that at the beginning." A nasty scowl crawled up over the speaker's face, and wiped out the smile he attempted to assume.

"We settled nothing but that I was to build the machine, Holdon was to furnish the money and each of us to have a half interest in the patents." Harris watched even the quiver of Price's eyelids.

"That's what I meant by a settlement," the other answered. "Just that, and I know no reason why it should not stand."

"There are to me several very substantial reasons why I should insist upon something more. Besides," he went on, "I have decided to do a certain thing and you might as well know it now as later. I propose to keep the rest of the drawings and the formula in my own hands until I have Holdon's agreement in black and white."

Price's face betrayed him, though he did his best to hide the fear that had put its markings on him.

"I—I don't understand you," he stammered.

"Then, this will help you to understand. I want five hundred dollars to cover cost of finishing the machine. Then I'll go ahead. As soon as Holdon signs up, I'll turn all the drawings and formula over to you and not until then."

"This is an extraordinary demand, Mr. Harris." Price tried to look indignant. "And, I must say, your language is insulting to both Mr. Holdon and myself. It implies a suspicion on your part that we are not—not acting in good faith."

"Take it that way, if you like," Harris answered, hotly. "But I tell you for the last time, I want five hundred dollars to-day. If you don't want to go ahead on that plan, I'll see a lawyer and find out what my rights are."

Thoroughly alarmed at the mention of a lawyer being brought into the case, Price capitulated.

"Harris," said he, "you are unreasonable, but to show you that I am above resentment, even when you insinuate that I am not dealing fairly with you, I will give you my check for the five hundred and leave the whole matter in your hands. Could anything be fairer than that?" he demanded with a great show of outraged innocence.

"That's fair, Mr. Price, and the sooner you bring Mr. Holdon and me together, the better it will suit me."

That ended the interview. Price lost no time in writing all the facts to Holdon, and in reply received the following letter:

Dear Price—You must get those drawings and the formula, and I don't want you to employ any one else. Do it yourself. Go to him and take the enclosed letter; let him read it. He will hustle the thing along. Tell him I want to know when everything is ready and I will try to get back as soon as he can show me the completed drawings.

As soon as Harris reports everything ready for my inspection, get him out of the city. Martin knows where his folks live. A telegram calling him home will do the business. You know what to do as soon as he's gone.

Put everything in Robinson's hands, and tell him to push the work. Be sure and put everything back just as you found it before he gets back. Then go ahead as though nothing had happepned. Holdon.

Destroy this.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRICE IN THE ROLE OF A BURGLAR.

For six days and nights after the receipt of Holdon's letter, insisting that the remaining drawings for the Harris moulding machine be secured at the earliest moment, Price had worked with Harris in the little shop during the day, and had shadowed him evenings until he discovered that the mechanic was working on his drawings at home until late in the night. This fact established, he laid his plans for the robbery of the worker, as soon as he was sure the work of drafting the last piece of the machine had been finished.

On Monday morning, when Charley approached the shop, he found Price standing shivering at the door.

"I'm a little bit late this morning," he observed; "had to make a slight change in one of my drawings; the difficulty developed yesterday when I placed the lower gearing in the machine." He turned the key in the lock and both men entered, Harris exclaiming:

"I could well afford to work late last night, for I finished the drawings and will take them to the pattern maker to-morrow."

"I'm glad to hear that, Harris; it's the best news I've heard in a long time. How long will it take to finish the machine?"

"Why, if I can get the heavier machine work at the time promised, we ought to have the machine ready for a test run inside of three weeks."

"Just what Robinson said about his machine." Price was thinking; aloud he said: "That's better than ever. Holdon ought to be here in two weeks, then we can have your 'black on white' scruples satisfied, and get down to business." This open, free-handed talk of meeting his demands for a settlement between Holdon and himself thoroughly disarmed Charley and made him ashamed of his earlier suspicions. And to make amends

he opened his heart to Price, telling him of the successful tests his moulding compound had stood and that he had measured and weighed out enough of the several ingredients to make the moulds for their trial run. Well satisfied, the mechanic went about his work, while Price poured forth his admiration of this or that ingenious device about the machine.

It was in the neighborhood of ten o'clock when Price, preparing to go back to the city, said: "I'm going to write Holdon to-day, and I know he will be more than pleased with the progress you have made. By the way, suppose I come out to your place to-night and talk over the business end of the deal. If we get together on it before Holdon comes, it won't take so long to settle matters then."

"Why, I don't know but that would be a good plan."

"All right, I'll be out to the house about eight o'clock," Price replied; but, as he went toward the car tracks he said to himself: "I won't get there quite so early, but when I do arrive, it's dollars to doughnuts he won't be there."

"Martin certainly did good work on the Harris case," he observed, as he reached his apartments. "If Harris knows any more about his family or his wife's people than I do, he's welcome to it."

Seated at a table with a telegraph blank before him, he pondered:

"Wonder which would draw him the quickest, a wire from home or from his wife; whichever it is, I've got to make it so urgent that he won't wait to take those drawings to the pattern maker. If he did, the whole game would have to be recast. Well, here goes a quarter, heads it's mother; tails, the wife."

The coin flipped toward the ceiling, fell whirling over and over.

"Tails, by George! Just what I wanted."

About thirty minutes later a man wearing a slouched hat, soiled negligee shirt, clothes to match and a faded brown overcoat, stood at the corner of Randolph and Dearborn with an envelope in his hand. The winter winds whistling down the throat-like streets caused him to bend over and shield his face from the icy blast.

"Damned funny where all the messenger boys are," he muttered, after standing for some time in the cold.

A hot chestnut vender opened up for business a few feet from where he stood, and after buying a bag of nuts the man in the faded brown overcoat asked:

"Know where a man could find a messenger this time of day, stranger?"

"Sure ting, frein—you want to pay—how much?"

"Why, a dollar if I can have the message delivered at once."

"You watch the stand; I'll git a boy"; the vender was gone. He had returned in five minutes with a lad of about fourteen.

"It's my boy," he exclaimed. "You give him the letter; I take the dollar."

"And here's ten cents besides; I sold some nuts." Price grinned, and after giving the boy explicit instructions, returned to his rooms.

"There's only one chance of a hitch, and that's remote, for I don't think he'll ever dream of it being a 'phony' message—he hasn't had enough business with the wires to know what trimmings go with the delivery of a genuine message."

Charley was getting ready to go out to lunch when the message was delivered. He stood with the unopened envelope in his hand long after the boy had left the little shop, and for the life of him he could not have sworn as to whether the boy wore uniform or not.

The type-written message was short:

D————, Jan. 10, 19——.

Your wife is dying; come on first train.

Holcomb.

The message was addressed to his place of residence, and the first clear thought he had aside from the message was that some one had directed the boy to the shop when he could not deliver the message at the house.

Gone from Charley Harris' thoughts completely as though they never had existence, were all the loose ends of his work. Everything else save the thought that Mary had called to him was lost out of mind, and two hours later he was on his way to the Grand Central station, where he waited an hour; one of those hours that stretch across a lifetime and reach out beyond.

That night a figure wrapped in a faded brown overcoat and wearing a cap pulled down over face and ears, left the building where Price had apartments, left by the back way and later entered with a roll of papers and bulging pockets.

"There, by the gods, I'm glad that's done. My, that was a beastly job, but I've got the goods, compound and all."

The speaker threw the roll of papers on the table and emptied his pockets, tried the door, removed his shabby clothing and consigned them to the top shelf in a closet. Ensconced in smoking jacket and comfortable in slippers, he pulled a chair to the table, and after lighting a cigar, began the examination of the papers.

* * * * * *

"For the Lord o' mercy, if it ain't Charley!"

The speaker, Jed Holcomb, was standing with his body blocking the doorway. Open-mouthed, disconcerted, he gazed at the man, who but a moment before had knocked upon the front door.

"Well, father, she isn't—she isn't dead?" Charley began.

"Who isn't dead?" Jed asked in a shaking voice, as he stepped out on the porch and closed the door behind him.

"Why, Mary. I got your message. You——"

"My message, Charley, why, I ain't sent you no message—an' Charley, don't tell mother I sent you word to come; she'd think—they'd both think, I sent it so as you'd come an' break off th' business——"

"You didn't send a message, you say?" The young man spoke slowly while Jed nodded vigorously. "And Mary is not sick?" he went on, then asked: "What does it mean? Let's go in and talk it over."

The old man laid a hand upon his son-in-law's arm and said: "I hate like pizen to tell you boy, but mother is a gitten a divorce fer Mary to-day, and a young goslin' of a preacher will be a-courtin' her open an' aboveboard to-morrer. I don't like it, but they ain't no use to holler, and you see it wouldn't do fer me t' have you in th' house when they come back." He looked furtively up and down the street. "They may be comin' back any minute now."

Stunned, bewildered, and at a loss to account for his inability to even answer the stooped figure before him, the young man stood shuffling his feet and frowning at the door. "What could he do? What did it all mean?"

"They are comin' Charley; please don't stay."

Jed's eyes were on the stretch of street to the south and Charley turned in that direction.

"Yes, the larger figure was Martha, and the other—in spite of all he had suffered, a strange heart hunger possessed him.

"If they see you an' think I sent for you, they won't be no livin' with either of them, t' say nothin' of both——"

The pleading eyes of the older man brought Charley to his senses.

"You are right, father; you are right," and as he took the old man's hand, he added: "I'm glad I came father, glad to have a sight of you, remember that. I'll go out the alley way." he added, and with a last good-by swung down the steps and traveled the familiar path to the little barn, then down the alley to a side street.

"What can it mean? Did some one here who knew about the divorce proceedings wire me, in order to make more trouble for all of us? That must be it," Harris told himself as he hurried to a hotel. "And it proves that mother was right when she said half the trouble in the world was caused by people who were afraid there would be less of it to-morrow than there was yesterday, and in order to keep up the average and give God something to forget and the devil one more soul to remember, work overtime at trouble brewing."

At the hotel he asked when he could get a train for Chicago.

"The bus has gone, but if you hurry you can make it," the clerk replied, and the guest hurried out into the night.

Martin had not discovered that Harris and his wife had parted. All he knew was that she was with her folks. And Price had calculated that even after Harris discovered the message to be a fake, he would hardly return to the city within a couple of days, and that would be ample time in which to get prints of all the

drawings as well as an analysis of the compound. But Harris, as we have seen, spent but little time at the home of the Holcombs and was on his way back, while Price was skulking down side streets with his loot.

CHAPTER XV.

HOLDON RETURNS.

The first man the Honorable Horace Holdon met upon his return from Kansas City was none other than ex-Superintendent Price.

"Get my wire?" he asked cheerily, when Price met him at the Eagle.

"Yes, and I've got other things."

"Not the Harris plans?"

"Yes, everything," Price affirmed. "And it was like taking candy from a baby. But between you and I it won't be a baby we'll have to handle if he ever gets next to the deal. He got back before I could return the swag. He's dangerous."

The magnate laughed softly.

"Think he's dangerous, do you? Well, if he wants revenge, he'll have to take it out of either you or Robinson; I want the machine, and if some one besides Harris can show me a machine that will do the work—say," he turned suddenly and shot a quick look at Price. "You are sending all the drawings and claims to Washington in Robinson's name, are you?"

"Sure thing, and I have his bill of sale for the machine; this is it." He extracted an envelope from a number he had taken from his pocket, and as he handed it to Holdon, remarked: "The model maker will have his work finished within two weeks."

"That's good," Holdon mumbled, as he read the document Price had handed him. When he had finished reading he looked up. "I see you have taken care of your own interests in this conveyance." The tone was not pleasant, and Price flushed.

"Well—er—yes," he stammered. "I have taken all the risks, and I don't think a half interest in the machine is any too much."

"Well, I think it is too much, and I would strongly advise that you do a bit more thinking along that line, and when you get it thought out, I shall expect an assignment of the interest this document gives you."

"But," Price began, when Holdon, with a wave of his hand, declared:

"There are no 'buts' in this case, Price, and I thought you understood it. I gave you instructions and the money to carry them out. I told you I *wanted that machine.* I never intimated that I wanted to enter into a business partnership with you, did I?"

"No, but——"

"There it goes again; I tell you there are no 'buts' in the case. For a certain sum per month you agreed to handle this matter, did you not?"

"Y-e-s," the answer was long in coming, though short in itself.

"Was there anything said about you having a half interest or any other interest in the machine?"

Holdon waited for some time for the "No," Price reluctantly uttered.

"I am glad, Price, deuced glad, your memory is better to-night than it was when you had that assignment drawn up," Holdon observed, laughingly, and after giving his agent instructions for the morrow, excused himself and went home.

When Price reached his apartments he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

"The old hog wants the middle of the trough, does he? And after me running the risk of a trip to the pen. Well, my dear, good, ambitious boss, I haven't forgotten that I have a couple of letters of yours marked "Destroy this' safely tucked away, and before I assign the half interest in Harris' patents, I rather guess I'll mention the fact that I forgot to destroy them and see then if there are no 'buts' in the case."

He had his feet on the table, a cigar between his teeth, and was planning the last battle of his campaign.

"Gad, I wonder if his hair won't curl some when he finds out how much I took out of the Holdon Company. Hope he don't study his bank balance too close before we get this Harris business finished up."

A vigorous knocking on the outer door brought Price to his feet.

"Now, who——"

The knocks being repeated even more vigorously, he called out, "Come in," and Charley Harris entered.

As their eyes met, Price put a trembling hand on the table, and tried to utter a welcome, but the face of his visitor, the aggressiveness, determination, desperateness of the whole man unnerved him. He had told Holdon they would not have a baby to deal with should this man ever "get next."

"God, Price, I didn't know you were taking it so hard, too," Charley burst out, throwing himself into a chair.

Price had his cue. With a sigh of relief, he, too, sat down, and the visitor, looking at his host, noted a pallor and nervousness he had never before observed about the man.

"Take it hard," Price began in a low voice. "Why should I not take it hard? Think of the money I've spent, besides Holdon's back and don't seem to take much stock in the story you tell. He insists upon having the machine and says he will have it if he has to buy it from——"

"The thief," Harris finished.

"Yes, the thief," the other agreed.

"But, see here, Price, whoever stole those drawings and that compound, can't finish the machine unless he has the drawings and specifications belonging to that part of the work I had already finished."

He brought his fist down on the table with a thump. "And what I came up here for to-night was to find out if you ever allowed any one to take copies of the drawings you took to the pattern maker?" Looking straight at Price, he demanded an answer.

"How absurd," that gentleman declared, and conveniently dropped a match, stooped to recover it, and while relighting his cigar, gained the time necessary to shape his answer. "Absurd, Harris, utterly absurd! I've been in business too long to do such a fool thing as you surmise."

"Well, will you tell me what could have possessed a thief to take those drawings of mine, and that heavy

compound and leave money lying in the drawers he rummaged through? Tell me that; tell me what use he could possibly make of them, unless he had the rest of them? I tell you there's been a leak and it wasn't at my end. The old pattern maker says not a soul but you ever saw the drawings, the last man says you visited him often and as I had told him you were in the deal with me, he never thought to keep the work away from you."

Harris paused, but Price did not take his eyes from the ceiling, as he said:

"I surely told you I visited the last pattern maker; you see, I couldn't always take time to run clear out to the shop, and I was as anxious as you to see the thing completed before—before Mr. Holdon's return."

"And you never made duplicates of my drawings or gave a description of the machine to any one other than Mr. Holdon?"

The question came in a low voice, but it carried something of menace in its timbre.

"Never!" Price almost shouted, turning squarely toward his visitor and reassuring him. His shaking nerves told that he did not miss the measure of the man he had robbed.

"That's all, Price."

Harris got to his feet, pulled his hat down over his eyes and strode to the door. There he hesitated, turned, and facing his host, said:

"The man who stole those drawings has stolen the rest of the machine, and, so help me God, I will kill him —I would kill him if I knew that there was a red-hot hell waiting for me."

The visitor was gone, but Price did not retire until he had considered every possible chance he could conjure up whereby the mechanic who had had a vision, might discover the truth.

CHAPTER XVI.

MICKEY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

Charley Harris determined while on the way home after his talk with Price to see Holdon the next morning, and accordingly went to the foundry early.

When he inquired for Mr. Holdon, a clerk informed him that Holdon was no longer connected with the establishment in an official capacity, and the disappointed mechanic was loitering about on the street in front of the plant, hardly knowing what next to do, when he saw Mickey Dougherty scuttling into an alley on a side street as though he were trying to avoid some one.

Without a thought, other than that he owed the cripple an apology for his unceremonious leave-taking some months before, Charley ran down the side street and fairly ran into Mickey at the mouth of the alley.

"Well, of all things!" he exclaimed. "How are you, Mickey?"

"Did he see youse, too?" the other questioned, holding out his hand.

"Who see me?" Harris asked, as their hands clasped.

"Why, his nibs, de boss!"

"No, I guess not—was it Mr. Holdon you meant? If it was I assure you I want to see him and I will—was it Mr. Holdon?"

"Yep, Mr. Holdon."

"Where did you see him?"

"Why, as I was a-makin' a sneak back of de works, trying t' see some one I knows, he comes along on de street an' stops. I turns from a lookin' tru' de fence an' it's him; so I hits de high places only, till I gits most down dis alley."

"But why in the world would you run; are you working? What have you been doing since I left?"

"Say, Charley," Mickey looked up soberly. "Them is long questions an' I ain't got answers fer all of them,

'cept this: I was makin' my git-away 'cause I don't want t' meet Old Holdon. I ain't bin in th' works fer a thousand' years, an' what I bin doin' since I seed youse last I'd give—I'd give anything t' be able t' fergit—an' that's all I kin tell yer, Charley—all I kin tell anybody."

Charley stood looking at the forlorn little figure before him. The months that had passed since they parted had stamped old age on the face of Mickey Dougherty, and the man standing more than head and shoulders above him for the time forgot his troubles as he pictured the hard luck Mickey must have experienced to so change him.

"Mickey," he put a hand upon his companion's shoulder. "I've got a few dollars and a place to eat and sleep; won't you share them with me?"

"Me? W'y, I don't need no money; what I need is frien's—frien's—some one t' help me. I'm—I'm desperate, an' I don't no more know what t' do'n a rabbit."

The Irishman lifted his blue eyes to Charley's face, and Charley saw not only the quivering lips, but great salty tears welling up and out of those appealing eyes. He could appreciate the gravity of a situation which would force tears from the eyes of Mickey Dougherty, and his heart went out to his old-time chum.

"Mickey, we all run into hard lines in this world, and I feel that mine are about as hard as man was ever called upon to endure. So let's halve our troubles by taking up our old friendship, and I promise you I will not run away again without a good-by."

"All right, Charley, an' I'll go out home with youse; might jist as well live with youse as anybody—better, I guess—but, I ain't a-promisin' t' spill my troubles, not even if youse asks me."

So it happened that Mickey got scent of a new trail that night when Charley told him of the robbery, and of his visit to Price, and that gentleman's avowal that he was not responsible for any "leak" that might have led up to the robbery.

Mickey's memory of a conversation they had had when Charley first told him that Price had invented a moulding machine and wanted him to build it, together with the suspicion aroused when he overheard Price

and Moran that morning, came back to him, and he determined to shadow Price until either he or Harris had found a clue to the thief.

This new occupation was a relief to him, inasmuch as it lifted his mind above the rut in which his troubles had confined it.

Two days later Charley found him at the house when he returned home from an interview with Holdon.

"Say, Charley, you know I worked in the foundry, an' ought t' know when I sees a machine t' do that sort ov work, hadn't I?" was Mickey's welcome as Charley entered the room.

"Sure thing—why, I'll bet you'd know what my machine was for the minute you put your eyes on it."

"Well, suppose youse opens up a little, an', startin' at the ground, tells me what your machine looks like; how it is run: where youse pours in th' iron; how th' castin's is made, an' what sort of a contraption it is on top. Tell me all about it, so as I kin jist see it in front of my eyes."

"Why, that's easy, Mickey, even if they did steal all my drawings, I can see the machine. It's like this: It sets on the floor on a base shaped like this." He drew a sheet of paper to him and quickly drew an outline. Mickey followed every movement of the pencil and never uttered a word until the whole machine had been described, and the more important parts outlined; then he straightened up.

"Charley, ef youse'l promise not to do nothin' rash, not to try t' make me tell youse nothin' till I'm ready, I'll tell youse somethin'."

"Promise! Promise! Why, of course, I'll promise; fire away."

"Then it's this; I seen yer machine."

"Were you out at the shop?" Charley interrupted.

"No, not to th' one youse mean; but I was t' a shop."

"And saw—oh, pshaw, you're joking."

"Not on yer life; I hain't jokin'; I tell youse I seen yer machine. It's changed some, but it's made to do th' same work."

"Where did you see it?"

"There you goes. I knowed youse would, but youse

gived a promise an' I'm a-goin' t' hold yer t' it; I ain't ready t' tell nothin' else. When I am, youse'l know who stold yer machine—an' I'll have another som'thin' offen my mind."

By every means short of force, Harris tried to worm from the cripple at least a part of the story he knew lay behind his sturdy assertion, that he had visited a shop and had seen the Harris Automatic Moulder.

Finally Mickey looked at the clock, saying: "I got t' be hittin' it, Charley."

"Why, what on earth! It's bed time and we haven't had supper. You aren't going out this time of night. Wait, I'll get something to eat."

Mickey, declaring he had to go and that he couldn't wait for anything to eat, left the house, leaving a much perplexed mechanic to mull over some much mixed and perplexing probabilities.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST—A SON.

How many thousand homes. how many, many mothers' hearts might well carry these three words: "Lost—a son!" or even these: "Lost—a daughter!" branded with the ever hot iron of memory where the world might read.

As you and I have become acquainted with Joel Holdon—know his willful, bestial crimes, I doubt if one of us could force a tear to fall in tribute to his memory. We know, but his father and sister do not know. And supposing they did know, is it not within reason that they would charge the son's crime to the woman's passion and move heaven and earth to reach the one responsible for his death? Is this not the way in which we square away the sins of our own flesh?

"It's no use, Bee. The agency Price put on the case, and the detectives White hired, as well as those I engaged because they thought they had a clew, have all come to the same conclusion—Joel was killed somewhere between Kansas City and a point west of Dallas, Texas, killed for the money and jewelry he carried." The father paused and stroked the girl's head, as it lay upon his shoulder.

"Did they, did they do everything, everything money could do?" she asked between sobs.

"Everything, sweetheart, everything. I wouldn't be here to-night if they hadn't. We thought we had a strong clew in Dallas, but while the experts declare a signature on a hotel register there was written by Joel, we were unable to find the slightest trace of him, or, for that matter, of the Mr. Smith who registered that night. Aside from a couple of loungers and guest there was no one but the clerk in the office. A week later the clerk went to El Paso; we brought him back because the men who were in the office swore this Mr. Smith wore clothes such as Joel had on when last seen in Kansas City, and

carried a suit-case. The suit-case was missing, though the men swore Mr. Smith did not take it with him when he went out to some address to which he had inquired the way. Of course the detectives suspected the clerk of having taken the suit-case, but he established his innocence. He remembered where this Mr. Smith went, or at least where he directed him to go. The detectives discovered that a Southern woman, named Estella something, a baby, a colored servant and a crippled fellow lived at the address the clerk had given. By the time we had gotten there, or a little before, they had left the city; she to join her husband in St. Louis, then go South. We followed every clew; I went out to the house, but I never believed Joel had been there. He couldn't have known the woman, and if he had he wouldn't have stopped there on his way to be married."

"Wasn't it strange he never told us he was engaged?" Beatrice whispered.

"Yes, it was strange, but, sweetheart, men do strange things."

Silence fell over the grand setting supplied for this recounting of a life tragedy, while the father thought how little he had known his only son, as he reviewed the side lights upon his life, this quest for him had revealed. And the sister silently prayed that her wayward brother might be restored to her, promising in her heart to forgive and forget all that had passed, if he but returned to them.

"I have done everything; will continue to do everything so long as the agencies will take my money; but, I have lost hope. The detective now in the South has run a dozen clews to earth and is asking to be relieved. I have put another man on the back track, to find out—to find out if there was any relationship, any circumstance that might, if discovered, give us a fresh hold; but so far, there are no developments."

"Did he take much money with him?" Beatrice asked at this point.

"Yes, all he could rake and scrape together; besides, he bought about four thousand dollars' worth of diamonds and such stuff."

"Four thousand!" the girl exclaimed.

"Yes, a present to his bride-to-be. I will pay for them to-morrow. Besides, he borrowed money, and—but, I shouldn't be telling you this." Holdon bent and kissed his daughter. "The boy is known to have exhibited his money and talked of the jewels he was taking with him, and it is the opinion of the police that the plot to do away with him was hatched here, and that he was lured to his death by some one he believed to be a friend."

Beatrice sat up and with her hands locked behind her father's neck, looked into his tear-dimmed eyes.

"Oh, daddy, he was a foolish boy. I know how you have longed for years for him to settle down; but, daddy, if he'd only come home, only come home!"

"Yes, if he'd only come home," the father repeated, and added, "I could forgive everything; but, he won't come, Bee, so you and I will just have to make the best of it, and forget that we ever hoped to see Joel a substantial, steady-going business man. We will have to learn to forget, Bee, forget."

"And forgetting is doubly hard when we do not know what it is we must forget, doubly hard," the girl observed as Holdon got up and announced that he had to meet an engagement downtown.

The engagement the Hon. Horace Holdon had to meet, was with Mr. Abner, the new president of the Founders' Trust. They had been discussing business in a general way for about fifteen minutes, when Mr. Abner turning his little head with a jerk, blinked savagely, and observed: "Your superintendent, that man Price, left things in a nice mess here."

"What do you mean?" Holdon scowled. He had never loved Abner, and although he had given up his hold on the plant and the remunerative office of president to satisfy a widening ambition, he still felt jealous of Abner, and did not relish that little man's tart comment on certain conditions he had found upon taking charge of the plant.

"Oh, I know you will champion him, Mr. Holdon. When I think so much of a man that I hand him a check and tell him to fill it in," Abner began banteringly, when his visitor interrupted hotly: "A matter of business,

my dear sir, a matter of business, if you refer to the check I gave Mr. Price when you took charge."

"Exactly, exactly," Abner chuckled and rubbed his hands. "And do you know, I've often wondered if you yet know the figure that check was drawn for?" Another soft chuckle and an added question: "Do you?"

"No, I don't, having been out of the city practically ever since I handed it to him." He paused. "If it will relieve your mind any, suppose you tell me the figure." Holdon leaned back smiling at the neat turn he had given his last speech.

"With all the pleasure in the world." Taking the auditor's report from a drawer, he ran his eyes over it hurriedly and looking up, said:

"The auditor found him thirty thousand short."

"Thirty thousand devils!" Holdon was out of his chair and had snatched up the report.

Mr. Abner paused but a moment and went on.

"And of course the check you so kindly signed for him was drawn to cover that amount."

Holdon had mastered all outward show of anger when he finally handed the report to Abner. He remarked calmly: "Come to think of it; that would be about the figure after he had drawn for the deals I had entrusted to him. Of course, at first blush, I was startled. To accuse a man of being short thirty thousand without the proof to back your assertion is just a bit lurid, you know, and it caught me."

"Well, I'm glad it's all right, for, to be frank with you, while it would seem that I was mistaken in this matter, I can assure you, I have not changed my mind about the man—he's——"

"He's earned your ill will because he refused to let you have your own way here before he was satisfied that my interests were being fully protected," Holdon said aloud, but inwardly he was boiling.

"Have it that way, if you please, my dear friend, and let us hope you need never change your mind," Abner answered calmly, and other visitors being announced, Holdon took his departure.

He had a second appointment to meet, and went to it in anything but a good humor. This time, he was to

meet the man who had been robbed. Going direct from the office of Mr. Abner to his suite of rooms over "Shifty" Smith's, he did not have long to wait before Harris was heard knocking upon the door that connected the suite with the vacant room in the adjoining building, through which Price had taught him to seek entrance. Holdon was not expecting a visitor from that direction by daylight, and for a moment, hesitated to throw the bolt. The knock being repeated, he shot back the bolt, and Charley Harris, hat in hand, stepped in. The magnate was so surprised that he did not question the visitor as to how he had obtained knowledge of the secret entrance. On the contrary, without a word, he led the way into the room where Charley had seen him once before, standing by the table, while Price insisted that he was out of the city.

"Well!" When seated, Holdon uttered this one word.

"I've been robbed," Harris answered.

"It's the common lot of men," the host observed with a sneer. "You don't need to feel bad about it, we all get touched occasionally, you know."

"But, some one has stolen my machine—and——"

"And, see here; I've a mind to throw you through the window." Holdon had let all holds go. "You and your machine! Did you ever have a machine? I don't believe a word of it. You and Price, between you, have been bilking me out of good money for a year on the strength of a machine I never saw. I tell you, young man, you've played your last card; and you wouldn't be here now with your tale of robbery if you knew——"

"I protest, Mr. Holdon, I do know that you are unjust. Let me explain."

Harris was on his feet.

"You want to protest, do you? Find Price; then the two of you come up here together, and I'll listen to your protest."

"But, Price is as much in the dark about——"

"Get out of my sight!" Holdon thundered at Charley's intimation that Price was innocent of something unstated, but innocent. "Get out, you young thief—you robbed, indeed!"

"Don't you call me a thief; I might forget your age," Charley broke in in a choked voice.

"Then go; how many times must I tell you?"

On the street, Harris started toward Clark street, when a figure darted out of a doorway. A hand was laid upon his arm and he heard:

"Don't go that way; youse don't want t' be seen by a party I'm layin' fer—go back home. I'm a-comin' out purty soon an' I've got a piece ov news fer youse."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE AT A CONFERENCE.

Judge Terwill, actuated solely by a patriotic desire to serve his city(?), had called a conference in Fat Fred's suite at the Eagle for the afternoon of the day following Holdon's discovery of Price's duplicity and his summary disposal of Harris.

It is quite probable had the judge known the status of affairs between Price and his master, Price would have been left out, and Price, who had been working like a beaver with pattern maker, machine builder and model maker, had a grist of good news for his employer and thought there would be an excellent opportunity at the conference to lay these matters before him. Judge Terwill, having transacted all business relative to Holdon and the spring campaign through Price, naturally concluded that he was to be Holdon's right-hand man, suds dispenser, small change passer and molly-coddle buffer-in-general, therefore the invitation.

Price arrived ahead of his employer. When the latter came in, and after greeting the others present sat down as far away from Price as possible and without a word to him, that gentleman got up, went over to the magnate and whispered: "I've got a lot of things to tell you—could you——" he got no farther.

Tapping the arms of his chair to keep his hands off the man who began to go white under his withering look, Holdon hissed: "Yes, you have a lot to tell me, and you'll come when I send for you; don't forget that."

Price backed away and resumed his seat as Fat Fred called upon the judge to state the reason for calling the conference.

The judge, carefully measuring his utterances, assured his hearers that he felt honored, etc., and was fol-

lowing this introduction with a plain statement of facts, when an interruption came.

"Do I understand that whatever may be said here to-day is to be considered confidential?" Holdon demanded without prefacing his speech in any manner.

"Most assuredly," the judge beamed. "We have abundant reason to be careful."

"Then I shall have to request the withdrawal of that man," Holdon pointed at Price.

"Well, well, well; but, I understood," the judge began, while the other gentlemen, uncomfortable and embarrassed, shot furtive glances at the principals in the action, but kept silent.

"That man," Holdon insisted, "must withdraw, or I will have no part in your——"

"I demand an explanation," Price spluttered, but his face told those who observed him that he lied.

"Mr. Price! Mr. Holdon! Gentlemen," it was the suave-voiced judge, "let us understand just one thing. Is or is not Mr. Price to have an interest in the—er—matters we are met to discuss?"

"Never!" Holdon bellowed.

"That being the case, gentlemen, I must bear the blame. Without consulting Mr. Holdon, I invited Mr. Price to this conference. But, of course, Mr. Price can have no desire to remain."

"None whatever," Price mumbled, and left the room.

With the atmosphere cleared and the remaining visitors vouched for by the judge, the conference progressed smoothly; a new state machine was organized and plans laid for capturing the party machinery in the city before the spring campaign opened. Through it all the nicely modulated voice of the judge purred on, calming the boisterous, satisfying the skeptical, encouraging the faint-hearted. When the gentlemen had finished their labors, it was understood that the Hon. Horace Holdon was to stand as the business man's candidate for mayor. Judge Terwill assumed charge of the press agency, Gardner took the saloons and gamblers, and the handling of the preachers and temperance people was left open. The judge opined he had the very man to spread the salve in that direction. Well satisfied

with each other and joying in the savory smell of the flesh pots but a little way beyond, the conference broke up.

Before leaving the club, Holdon had Price's apartments called up, and on being told Price was there, he gruffly ordered the boy to hold the phone. For fully five minutes he stood before the instrument with clinched fists and purple face before he could master his anger enough to trust his voice. Then, taking down the receiver, he asked that Price be called to the phone.

"That you Price? What's that? Don't talk that way to me, sir. I—I—why—what's that? Yes, I'll be there, nine o'clock to-night, and mind, there's to be no trying to dodge the issue. You either make good or by —— I'll put you where—"

"What's that? Oh, you will?"

The receiver went to the hook with a bang, and the magnate hurried from the club.

It was nearing nine o'clock that night, when two persons started downtown from the building in which Price had his apartments. One had left the building through the front exit, the other had sneaked out of the shadowy court as the first left the lighted portal. Down through the thoroughfares they went, seemingly inseparable as substance and shadow. At the entrance to the building adjoining "Shifty" Smith's, the shadow paused an instant, then darted in after the substance.

Three hours later Mickey entered Charley Harris' home and stood looking at the mechanic, who all the evening had sat brooding over his troubles. The cripple looked at him so long without speaking that Charley began to wonder if the little Irishman had lost his wits.

"Well, Mickey, have you lost your voice?" Charley finally asked.

"Not me, but I'se wonderin' how t' tell youse what I got ter—so as youse won't lose yer head."

"Lose my head? Why, Mickey, if anything in this world could make me lose my head, I wouldn't have it now."

"Wouldn't? Well, don't youse be too sure."

He sat down, threw off his coat and cap and seemed in no hurry to tell his news.

"Go ahead, Mickey, I'm waiting," the other admonished.

"All right, all right; I'se found yer robber, and it's two of 'em, 'stead of one."

"Don't joke, Mickey, please don't."

"No joke, Charley; this is th' word with th' bark on it. I seen both of 'em—heard all they says—an' now it's up t' youse."

"Heard them!" Charley stood with his hands spread out on the table, every nerve, every fiber of his body tense. "Mickey, don't tell me a word that is not God Almighty's truth." He measured the words one by one in a low voice. "God Almighty's truth, Mickey, for I am not to be played with, not by you, even."

The cripple looked up and something he read in the mechanic's face caused his voice to tremble as he went on:

"It's th' truth, Charley; I seen them—heard them—an'—an'——"

"Go on!"

"Well, if I must—it's 'Stinker' Price an' th' Boss—an' I wish t' God it hadn't a-bin' th' Boss. I ain't got nothin' agin him no more—God knows I ain't."

"Price and Mr. Holdon; is that what you mean?"

"Yes—them, an' nobody else," Mickey answered, passing a hand over his eyes to rid himself of the face he saw across the table. To himself he said: "He takes it a sight differenter as I thought he would—jist as quiet."

"Go on, Mickey."

"Well, youse remember last night, how I twigged youse an' tells yer youse better go th' other way? Well, I was a-layin' fer 'Stinker' Price then, an' I was some afraid he might shy off ef he sees youse moonin' 'round. He went up into th' buildin' jist th' other side ov 'Shifty' Smith's joint, an' I most froze 'fore he comes down; then purty soon down comes Mr. Holdon. Now I hooks 'em together on this robbin' business to oncet. Yer got t' use yer headpiece ef youse wants t' git next t' things in th' mertropolis, an' youse don't never want t' forgit nothin'. I remembers how Holdon wants yer machine, an' how Price was so mighty anxious t' find youse that time youse hit th' grit; so when I meets up

with youse this time, an' youse ses as how some bloke has swiped yer fixin's fer th' machine, I ses t' myself, 'Mickey, that ain't no hard nut t' crack; jist keep yer lamps on 'Stinker' Price, that's all.'"

"Yes, and then?"

"Don't look at me that way," the narrator protested. "I—I hev seen only one set of eyes that looked like yourn do—an' I got enough t' do t' fergit them."

Charley mumbled a promise not to look that way any more if Mickey would finish his story.

"Well, I was right as a rivet. I told youse I'd seen yer machine; it's in a little shop run by a man name of Robinson—at ——— street. I follered 'Stinker' Price there, an' when he went away I made up to Mr. Robinson—he's as innocent as can be—an' it didn't take me but two days t' find out that th' 'Stinker' was havin' a machine built. Then 'cause I acted like I'm half nuts, an' jist can't help it, I gets t' see th' machine, an' holds things an' gits tools fer Mr. Robinson. I asks youse, remember? what sort of machine it is, an' as soon as ever youse tells me I knows I got it straight; an' to-night fixed it." The cripple paused, got up and seemed loath to finish his story.

"Go on, go on! My God, man, don't you see how hard I am trying to be—to keep quiet, until you come to the end?"

"And then what?" Mickey demanded, shooting a quick look at the other.

"Leave that to me—but now—for God's sake—tell me the rest."

"I was a-feared of it." Mickey spoke more to himself than to his listener, and went on:

"Well, to-night, I follers th' 'Stinker' t' 'Shifty's', he goes up them same stairs an' I follers. Then when he's in th' back end of a side hall, he lights a match, opens a door an' goes in. I sees his match go out an' steps in with him. When I thinks what he'll do t' me if he lights another match an' sees me, I purty near croaks. But, I'm in there, an' he's huntin' fer another match, an' swearin' whilst I prays—prays, that he ain't got no more matches, which is 'bout th' only prayer I ever had answered, fer he ain't got none. Then he unlocks another door and says, 'guess I better see if that

other door is latched,' an' goes back t' th' first one an' I dodges in t' the one he's jist opened a minute afore an' begins t' feel fer some place t' hide, when I comes t' a other door an' it isn't shut, so I slips in an' finds I'm in a swell bedroom. Jist then I hears somebody sing out, 'That you, Price?' an' I knows to oncet it's my old boss. I makes a duck under th' bed an' from then on, I jist about fergot that I might be took out frum under that bed an' be skinned alive. First off, Holdon's fer handin' Price over to th' police, says he's robbed him of $25,000 an' when Price mentions your machine, Holdon fairly sizzles, he's so mad, swears that's another piece of robbery, says he's bin bamboozled by both of youse. Then th' 'Stinker' tells him where th' machine is and that by to-morrer night he can have th' drawin's, formula an' other papers all where th' boss can see fer himself that th' machine is all t' th' good. Then old Holdon fires at him. 'Hev them papers, th' assignment of your interest an' all th' rest of it here to-morrer night at ten o'clock, an' we will settle this machine business; an' see that youse is prompt, too, 'cause I'm goin' to stay here to-morrer night and you'll have to git through business by eleven o'clock.'"

"Did he say ten o'clock?"

"Yep, ten perzactly. Well, I thought th' show was about over an' was wonderin' how t' make me git-away, when Holdon says: 'Are youse going t' be prepared t' repay that twenty-five thousand to-morrer night?' Price waits a minute an' then says, 'I'll promise t' set youse right on th' machine, but will have t' take a little more time on th' money,' when Holdon snaps him up. 'No, youse don't; we clean th' whole business up to-morrer night. So come prepared,' and th' 'Stinker' agrees. An' they leaves suddin', an' say, I'm plum' scared till I gits t' thinkin' that all them locks jist hev keys fer th' outsides. Ennybody kin git out, but it takes keys t' git in. Comin' out here, I gits t' thinkin' how them gents has bin plannin' t' rob youse from th' start. An' how 'Stinker' Price gits it inter his nut t' help Holdon rob youse. Then when he has th' old man where th' hair is short, up an' robs him. Say, I'd like t' be up there to-morrer night, but I got other biz t' tend t'—bet yer life it will be gay."

"Well, why don't youse say something?" Mickey inquired after waiting a long time for Charley to comment upon his story.

"It's up to me to do, the saying's all been done." The tone of the speaker, was level, matter-of-fact, subdued, and Mickey looked at him in astonishment.

"Well, what do youse think ov that? Cooler'n me, an' it wasn't my machine." Mickey commented to himself while watching his host.

"You say Price is to have the drawings up there tomorrow—no, to-night? It's past one, Mickey."

"Yep, an' now I put youse next, I'm goin' t' look after a little biz of my own to-morrer, but I'll run out here in a day or two an' see how things is comin'—I'd advise youse t' see a lawyer."

"I won't need a lawyer, and, Mickey, I never expect to be able to thank you in this world——"

"An' no other counts with me," the cripple interrupted. "When I gits out of this cussed old world, I wants t' take a rest, an' I don't want nobody comin' 'round thankin' me fer anything I ever done here. I want ter fergit it."

"Then let me thank you now, and, Mickey, if anything should happen to me, and we should not meet again, remember I hold you the best and truest friend I ever had, my mother excepted."

"That goes," Mickey grinned. "That goes—an' th' best luck I could wish youse fer to-night is that youse could be under that bed. So long."

Charley stood in the doorway watching the cripple as he made his way down the street, then turning the key, he went to the light, drew a key ring from his pocket and examined two keys closely.

"I wonder does he remember—no, of course he does not, and if he did, unless he suspected or had discovered Mickey, poor little chap, he would never think of the possibility of——"

CHAPTER XIX.

MICKEY MEETS A TOPNOTCHER.

There was but one party at interest whose fear of meeting Fly Boyd grew as the days of her coming grew nearer, and that was Mickey.

What would she do—how would she receive the baby? How much of his story dare he tell her? How should he tell it? "Any ways," he concluded, as he mulled the matter over for the hundredth time, "they don't none ov 'em take my baby away from me. Wasn't de kid's mother bugs? Mighty queer she was set on a-sayin' she ain't never had no baby. An' the doc says they was a blank in her headpiece an' a obsession of some sort in her thinkin' work; an' me a-sittin' there a-tryin' t' look wise, when all I kin do is bat me lamps an' nod, an' me not a-knowin' a darned word he's a-sayin' hardly. Say, I wisht it was over, I wisht Fly would come."

And Fly came, but Mickey Dougherty did not meet her that day. He had found other business, as we have seen, business so engrossing that he even forgot the baby; of course, he wouldn't have forgotten the baby or missed Fly's home-coming had he not known that Mamie would care for the baby, and not being at the Michigan avenue house the day a wire came, telling them the mistress would arrive two days ahead of schedule, and then the business—well, surely Mickey may be excused.

When Mamie began the story of Mickey and the baby, Fly asked: "When will his highness, Mr. Mickey, arrive?"

"I've been expecting him any minute for three days."

"Well, he wants to put in an appearance inside of another three days, for I want to know this baby-hiding business to the bottom."

"I can tell you part of the story, Flo, and I think you will agree that I have done the right thing." Flo (to

Mamie, she was always "Flo"), leaning back in a comfortable chair, evinced her willingness to listen, and Mamie began. "You know how they came here, and I've kept you posted on everything up to the time she died. When she got over that first bad spell the doctor said she'd live, for her mind was freed from the sorrow that had been killing her. When she got well enough to talk, she wanted to know where she was, and said she had had such an awful bad dream. Looking all about and at us, she wanted to know who we were and how she came to be with us. My head ached from answering her questions, and I guess hers did, too, from trying to understand my answers. When Dr. Thomas came, the first thing he said was, 'Well, really, I didn't expect this; she will get well, but it is doubtful if she ever regains all her senses. I must see that little Irishman and make him talk.' Before he went away he had an opportunity to talk to Mickey, but when I asked him if he had learned anything, he only shook his head. One morning when she was able to sit up, Mickey, who had suffered keenly because she didn't know him, proposed that we try what the baby could do toward bringing her back to consciousness of the past. The baby was brought in by Jane, and Mickey took it and carried it over to her. She looked at it and smiling asked, 'Whose baby is it? Isn't it a beautiful little thing?' At that Mickey lost command of himself. His face went white and as he suddenly thrust the baby into her arms, he exclaimed, 'I'd think you'd be ashamed to disown your own baby; and it with no father or nothing but you an' me to take care of it!' She had caught the little thing in her arms when he thrust it upon her, but before he had finished speaking, she dropped it in her lap and looked distressed: 'It isn't my baby; I couldn't have had a baby. Oh, won't some one take it away and send that horrid little man out of my sight?' That was all she said, but the distressed voice and the bitter weeping that followed Mickey's experiment convinced us that it was best to let her have her own way. I did my best to make her believe it a joke, but with little success. She declared it was simply awful for Mickey to do such a thing. I left her and found Mickey in Jane's room on his knees by the baby's bed, crying as though his heart would break."

Mamie paused and looked fixedly at Fly. "I hope he will tell you all the story. There is a tragedy back of his love for this woman and baby; it's written all over his face."

"He will tell me," Fly declared.

* * * * * *

"Hello, Mickey, they tell me you have gotten to be a man of family since last I saw you."

Fly Boyd met our little Irishman with outstretched hand, as he entered her parlor the morning after he had delivered his startling news to Charley Harris.

"Yep, guess I'm it all right, all right," he responded. "But say, youse is good to look at in them togs. Say, d' youse know, Mamie jist about flunked when I brung the missus and baby here. She sure got cold feet."

"Do you blame her?" Fly asked, as she pointed him to a chair.

"Well, not so as youse ud notice; I reckon it was a big contract t' put up t' her."

"I should say so; and the baby, Mickey? Whose is it, and what are you going to do with it?"

"Whose it is," Mickey answered after some deliberation, "was fer it's mother t' say. What I'm goin' t' do with it is a heap sight bigger question than I kin find a answer to jist now."

"But if you'd tell, we could make its father take care of it, you know. Otherwise, it will have to go to some orphans' home."

"No, that kid don't go t' no old orfing's home. An' it don't need no father t' take care of it. I'm a-goin' t' see that kid raised, an' say—why won't youse kind of 'dopt it, Fly? Youse'd look mighty good with a baby like that."

The peal of laughter that greeted this speech rather dampened his ardor. What could she see that was laugh-provoking in a thing that to him was all tragedy?

"Really, Mickey, you are too droll. The very idea." And again the woman laughed.

"I don't see nothin' funny 'bout this here biz," Mickey protested.

"You don't?" Fly gasped between paroxysms of laughter. "Why, it's the funniest thing that ever hap-

pened. Whatever put it into your head to ask me to adopt the baby?"

"What's a feller a-goin' t' do with th' kid, ef some of his fren's won't 'dopt it?"

"I said you could send it to an——"

"An' I says nit! I got th' coin t' bring that kid up a lady, an', an'——"

"You've got the coin?" Incredulity written in every line, Fly looked intently at her visitor. "Now, Mickey, lets talk business," she admonished. "You say you have the coin. How much, that's the question?"

"Well, how much had it ought to cost to keep er kid like that a year?" Mickey parried.

"Oh, two or three hundred a year, and you know, you can't possibly get that much together year after year," she answered lightly.

"Can't I? Say, Fly, I kin show youse in a minute—say, I kin keep dat kid dressed in velvet, an' eatin' offen nuthin' but gold dishes fer a hundred years!"

Diving into a pocket, Mickey fished up a handful of bills, and held them out for Fly's inspection.

"And they's more where that come frum," he concluded as she took the bills.

"Twelve hundred dollars? Where in this world did you get it, Mickey?"

"Where I had a right to take it fer th' kid." He colored up and looked troubled when Fly pressed her question.

"They ain't no use, Fly, an' youse is just wastin' time. They ain't nobody but me an' God, if they is one, as knows, an' when I'm dead, they won't be nobody know. Say," he looked square into her eyes: "Youse never knowed me to be nothin' but square, did youse?"

"No, Mickey, I never did."

"Then ef I tells youse I hev a right t' that money long as I uses it t' take care ov th' kid, youse'll b'leve me, won't yer?"

"Y-e-s, Mickey, I believe you. But it seems so strange."

"An' Fly, it's stranger as it seems," he answered with a sigh, then looked up to ask: "What th' hell am I goin' t' do ef youse won't 'dopt th' kid? I had my heart set on youse; course Mamie'd take her, but Mamie ain't

Mamie, he was worth his weight in gold, even if he did let trouble and dope get the best of him."

"Yes, he was white," Mamie admitted; then asked: "What in the world did you want to get your hooks into Holdon for anyway?"

Fly clasped her hands in her lap and, bending forward, sat silent with her eyes on a figure in the carpet for a time, then looking up quickly, said:

"You remember, I had just broken with Jim and was desperate. The scheme came to me after reading a well written story in a Sunday paper. I thought I would marry this old millionaire when he wasn't around, go to Europe with him and milk him for all he would let loose of, then come home and tell him what he was up against and get a lump sum from him in order to keep me quiet and save him the notoriety an explosion would cause."

"And why didn't you do it?" Mamie wanted to know.

"Because he was too good to me, too good, Mamie. Why, there never was an hour when he did not treat me better than the majority of men treat their wives, I fancy. So, bad as I am, I could not bring myself to it, I could not; and if I could destroy the record of that little piece of business over in Michigan, I would gladly do it. The cold facts are, Mamie, I'm afraid it will come out. What could I tell him; what could I do?"

"Have you forgotten Jim?" the maid asked, reproval in her voice.

"Forgotten Jim? No, I have not; I never shall. But this case is different. Mr. Holdon has been square with me, and if I had known him as well then, well, I wouldn't have lugged poor old Tom over to Michigan!"

"As long as he don't know, I don't see why you should fret about it," Mamie protested; then advised:

"If I was you, I'd stick as long as he's good, and when it's safe, I'd let folks know how friendly he is. Some day that marriage may prove the best investment you ever made."

"So you'd go up there to-night?" Fly questioned.

"Sure I'd go. What are such men good for, if it isn't to keep up the running expenses?"

CHAPTER XX.

A HAND AT HOLDON'S.

Mr. Abner was a much shrewder manager of men than either the Hon. Horace Holdon or Mr. Franklin Price, and it followed that while he boiled privately, he was all smiles when any of his hands were about. The reports from the Corporations' Protective Association had convinced him that there was a "leak" in his office and a dangerous one. Taking over another man's business along with his mistakes but intensified Mr. Abner's determination to rid himself of the mistakes, greatest among which was the "raise" the hands had secured through Price's tactical blunder. But the new manager-president was not to rush blindly into a readjustment of wages. First, he had to find the "leak," then gradually dispose of the more aggressive unionists; then, and only then, could he put into execution his plans for a wide-open shop. From the first he strongly suspected the foreman and the confidential clerk Mr. Holdon had so warmly commended. To be forearmed is better far than to be forewarned. And Mr. Abner knew just what he proposed to do, therefore set about arming for the battle he proposed to bring on. His attorneys were given the names of all the unions having members in the Holdon plant and of the officials of the same, together with instructions to prepare a blanket injunction against them individually and collectively.

"And make it strong, so strong they can't do more than breathe, then when the crash comes I'll put them out of business once and for all. When the thing's ready bring it to me; I want to look it over." These were his exact words. And the forthcoming injunction pleased him.

"Can you find a judge who would issue it? They tell me most of your judges are politicians and are afraid of the unions," he observed to the attorney, and on that point he was reassured.

Moses Webster, who when a boy took up his home with the people who later gave him their name, found a note purporting to be from Moran on his desk one morning shortly after the president had examined the injunction he proposed to use as a club over the hands. As a result, he went out to the moulding floor to see what Moran wanted.

"Why, man alive, I never left a note for you, not on union business. Say, don't do it again," the foreman advised. "I tell you, for all his smiling, the new boss isn't asleep, an' you want to be careful."

Puzzled, the young man returned to his desk. And after examining the note carefully, thought, "If I'd taken a second look at it, I would have known Moran never sent it in."

"Mr. Abner wants you," a boy announced.

Webster looked up, then leaned back in his chair, and was lost in thought until the boy appeared again. At the second summons he hurried into the president's office.

"Well, young man, how's the Moulder's Union?" The question came point blank and the clerk stood dumb. "Did you see Moran?" came next, and Moses answered "Yes." "Well, young man, I don't know that I ought to waste words on you, but I will say this much, if half I believe of you is true, I ought to kick you off the premises."

To this the clerk made no reply. He knew his doom.

"I didn't think you'd have anything to say, a sneaking spy such as you generally is dumb when even confronted with a suspicion that he's been found out."

"So I'm a sneaking spy, am I?" The man in him had found voice.

The president whirled about in his chair.

"Yes, you are," he thundered, and the stenographer hastily quit her seat.

"Stay there, Miss Wagner, if you please; I may need you," he commanded, and Moses now ready for battle, replied with spirit:

"Yes, have Miss Wagner stay, have her stay; you may need her, but not to take down what I have to say to you—you——"

"What have you to say? Well, I like that." Mr. Abner had recovered his poise. "I like that," he repeated. "An informer, spy, ingrate, has something to say to the man who has found him out. Go ahead, young man, and you," to the stenographer, "see that you don't miss a word."

"Now, young man, what have you to say?"

The president leaned back smiling, but when he looked into the face and saw the eyes of the man standing beside his desk, the smile faded.

"You have made it easy, Mr. Abner, easy for me to tell you just what I think of you and the rest of the employers of labor, who organized the Corporations' Protective Association." Moses paused a moment, drew a long breath and trained his guns upon the enemy. "It comes with poor grace from you to accuse another of being a spy, when you, too cowardly to do a spy's work, hire, with the profits you take out of the workers, a lot of the world's outcasts to spy upon the men whose industry made your wealth." Abner put up a hand in protest. "No you don't; I will have it out! And I dare you to call any one, and you can't put me out; you, you Sunday saint! Haven't I followed you to church? Don't I know that you and I profess the same religion? Yes, and I also know that it was my religion that caused me to expose the Holdon Company's infamous scheme to put perjured spies into the unions; and since I have known you, and know that you are hand in glove with the spy furnishers and are at this time planning the destruction of the workers' sole defense against your greed, I often wonder if it is your religion that makes you a reprobate or ——"

"Stop that!" Abner was on his feet. "Stop that, you cur!" With clinched fists and livid face, he took one step toward the clerk.

"Not another inch, you whited sepulcher, not another inch! As I am a Christian, if you cross the border of that rug, I'll forget your age, everything, and do what I've longed to do ever since I learned that you were no better than Price or Holdon."

The president halted, and in a torrent Moses poured forth his pent-up indignation.

"What do such men as you care for us—the men and

women who work for you? What do you care whether our families live or die, whether we rot in filth or give way in the struggle for existence and help swell your criminal class? What do you care? And yet, you are a Christian! God save the name of Christian. You, a Christian! Why, your soul isn't big enough to lay on the furnace grates in hell—it would fall through into the ash pit. A man who will hire a conscienceless wretch to perjure his soul for a few filthy dollars isn't fit to be named barbarian, to say nothing of parading as a follower of Jesus Christ."

"I tell you I will not hear more of this; you are a fit candidate for an asylum!" Abner sat down and reached for the button which once pressed would bring a clerk to the room at double quick.

"Don't put your finger on that, or by all that's holy, I'll give the whole works just what you're getting," Moses declared, and Abner withdrew his hand and bent his head to listen. "When I first discovered that Holdon was of your stripe I wanted to quit my job, but I thought they might not bring on the spies after all. Then when they did come, I either had to surrender my religion or become an informer and spy in defense of the men. I chose to stick to the men; and I want you to understand that the only thing I regret in the whole connection is that the men did not treat Price to the same dose they gave the spies. So far as you are concerned, my prayer is that if you bring on another bunch of free-born patriotic perjurers the men will take you out and treat you the same as they did Farley and the others."

Moses sat down, but Abner did not look up. However, Miss Wagner did, and the young man glancing at her, read approval in her eyes.

"I've had my say," Moses went on after a painful silence, "and it's up to you—make it short."

Slowly the great financier turned in his chair, his face white and drawn.

"Young man," he began, "I don't want even a dog to hold such an opinion of me as you have formed. I—I never—," he paused to pass a hand over his face. "I —never heard such talk in my life, and I don't know how to meet it"; another pause. "I thought they paid you for the information—I really did."

"Then you were mistaken. I was paid through the approval of my own conscience, and while I faced, and face now, the greatest misery that may fall upon a propertyless man, lack of employment, embittered by the knowledge that you will blacklist me," Abner winced, "yes, blacklist me—I will go out of your office clean in heart and soul, clean in thought, and ready to face any indignity your power may put upon me and mine. I have done a man's duty in as dirty a fight for dollars as was ever waged against the men of my class."

The stenographer sat biting the end of her pencil and Abner, lost in thought, induced by the problem of what to do with this young rebel, pen in hand, sat marking his blotter with long strokes.

"Mr. Holdon to see you, sir," a clerk at the door announced.

And Mr. Abner relieved for the moment of an awkward burden, responded with alacrity, "Tell him to come in."

"And me?" Moses queried as Mr. Holdon entered.

"Oh, I'll attend to that later," the employer answered, his tone implying that the matter referred to was trivial.

For the remainder of the day Moses worked but little. He sat dreaming of a hunt for work, always ending in refusal because he had dared to be a man in the presence of one who had insulted him, and wondered how he would break the news to the little wife. Then, too, he wondered when Abner would send for him, or if he did not, how he would be disposed of, who would act as headsman?

That night he entered his modest little home weighted with a thousand cares that grew as he dwelt upon them.

"Oh, Moses, I have such good news! Why, what's the matter, are you sick dear?" The exclamation and question came in a breath as the wife lifted her face for a kiss.

"If your good news will offset my bad news," the husband began—

"Offset your bad news? Why, nothing in the world can be bad enough to weigh a feather."

"Don't be too sure," he smiled in spite of himself, as he looked into her radiant face.

"Too sure; why, Moses, I know. Haven't I got the letter? You know how badly I have wanted to get out of this dirty city for the children's sake?"

"Yes, dear, I know."

"Don't frown so; you do nothing else when you come from work lately, nothing else."

"Don't I love you and let the kids use me for a riding horse?" he demanded, taking her in his arms.

"Oh, yes—but you don't listen to my news," she pouted. "And it is almost too good to be true."

"I'm listening."

"Well, it took you a long time. You know how much I love Mother Webster? Well, they, she and father, have written that they want to quit the farm and move into that new town near them, and father wants you to take charge of the farm." Moses whistled. "But that's not the best news; you know they always said you should have the property some day? Well, mother writes that they have decided that this is no place for the children, and you know I never complained to her, and to induce you to go to them they are going to give us the farm now."

"Wait a minute, mother," the astonished husband protested. This being lifted out of poverty in a city and a jobless poverty at that, was too enervating; it was of the species of joy that kills. "Wait a minute, mother," he protested, "I—I——"

"Moses, you are crying, what in the world——"

He drew her closer to him and allowed his tears to fall unchecked. Back across the years, memory carried him to that night, that one night in his life that would ever stand out distinct from all other nights. He saw a sweet-faced mother, whose only babe had been taken from her, gather a poor, half-crazed little wanderer to her bosom; and from that day to the hour when he had gone out of her home into the great world she had been his rock in time of need. And here, at another crucial moment in his life, her hand and that of her jovial, big-hearted husband, were held out to him, to his.

Do you wonder that the flood gates opened?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PLOTTERS MEET.

"You are at least punctual in keeping your engagement," Holdon eyed the roll of papers and parcel Price deposited on the table, then continued. "I suppose you are prepared to meet my demand for the return of the money you appropriated during my absence?"

Price stood beside a chair he had drawn up alongside the one occupied by his employer.

"First, allow me to suggest that we settle the question of the existence or non-existence of the Harris machine," he advised, as he sat down.

"Oh, that's settled, I had Robinson on the 'phone," Holdon answered. "I am more interested in that money than in anything else just at present."

"And I insist that we will be able to settle that little point more amicably when you have my report, and see the figure this machine deal has set me back," the other persisted.

"Well, have it your way now; but I warn you, there isn't anything you can say will prevent me having that money out of—" he ceased speaking and got to his feet.

"What was that?" he demanded, searching the room from end to end with his eyes, his hands spread out upon the table before him. "What was that?" he repeated, while Price looked up quizzically to ask: "What was what?"

"Why, I'd swear I heard some one moving in this room."

Price smiled and untied the papers, while Holdon went through the rooms in a vain search for that some one. When he returned to the table, Price, without comment upon the interruption, plunged into the case in hand. Step by step, he knit about his vis-a-vis the web in which he hoped to hold him. From the beginning,

he laid great stress upon the fact that he had been deputed to get possession of the confidence of Harris, then secure the machine or the plans for it. Next, he took up his relations with Robinson and recounted the various steps he had taken to insure the building of the two machines. When he had finished, he said:

"In view of the fact that I have succeeded in getting this machine Robinson is finishing in shape for what cannot fail to be a successful test, and have the model so far along that it can be finished within the week, don't you think I had a right to draw sufficient funds to meet any emergency that might arise, without calling you into the case, and in event of a show-down, exposing you to——"

"Never mind that Price," Holdon interrupted. "Just pass those figures over; I want to see how much you have set over against this job."

"The figure is stiff enough," he commented, after carefully scrutinizing the statement Price had prepared. "But it don't commence to cover the twenty-odd thousand you took."

"No, it don't; but I have not finished the job. Besides, it seems to me that the man who is competent to handle so delicate a piece of business is entitled to something more than wages."

"And you call this a delicate job?" Holdon exclaimed in disgust. "Why, man, a fool could have robbed Harris of his eyes. Delicate nothing! It was boy's play!"

"It may seem so to you, who had no part in working it out, but, if you think it's boy's play to act the part of a thief and skulk through alleys and back streets—well, I only wish you might have a chance——"

"Tut, tut, Price, let's not become hysterical. You have no need to convince me of your histrionic abilities, since that little check scene enacted right in this room."

"I am not hysterical, however, when I insist that in view of the work I have done for you on this job, your little histrionic stunt at the conference the other day was a gross insult," Price retorted.

Holdon stared at his guest a moment, then blurted out: "Just drop that tone, my man. You are not sure enough of your footing to get farther from the ground."

"I want to stick to the ground," Price insisted. "Right

to the ground. And as for my footing, leave that to me."

Glaring at each other, Holdon first found words to express his feelings.

"You contemptible liar," he hissed. "You want to keep your feet on the ground, do you? Well, be careful how you move, or you'll swing high enough from the ground."

"Will I?" Price questioned, his face contorted by the play of passions long pent up. "Will I? Well, it won't be because your virtuous self has any part in the swinging; and, what's more, I tell you flat you either come to terms——"

"Come to terms! Come to terms! You scum!" Holdon struck at the man beside him, biting his lips and puffing like a winded bull the while. Price dodged and pulling his chair farther away, turned a set, white face to his antagonist.

"You had best keep your temper, Holdon," his voice was low, "because I've something to say to you that may try it a bit—a bit more," he corrected.

Holdon still biting his lips, sat humped over, as though prepared to spring at his agent.

"You have called me a thief," Price began, intently watching his neighbor. "A thief, and I want to tell you why I took some twenty thousand dollars of your money. You hired me to rob Harris, and I hadn't been in the game long until I made up my mind that you would rob me if you got a chance. That being the case, I proposed to put myself in a position where I could force you into a gentleman's agreement to keep your hands off me. I have brought all the plans for both the Harris and Robinson machines with me to-night. I also have the Harris formula and the compound as he made it up. I also have two letters you wrote me from Kansas City—you——"

"You devil! Didn't you destroy those letters?"

It was not a belligerent man, but a suppliant who asked the question, and Price did not misunderstand in the slightest degree what the changed tone implied.

"I should say I did not destroy them," he boasted.

"And you have them with you?" Holdon asked, wetting his lips with his tongue.

"Not me, they're in a box behind a good lock."

"What do you propose——"

"Yes, I, too, would like to know just what he proposes."

Both men turned on the instant and started to leave their chairs when the same voice, calm, cool, and desperately deliberate, said:

"Gentlemen, you will please be seated again and put your hands on the table; that's right—now, the first one of you to lift a hand will beat the other one to hell by about three seconds." The speaker paused.

Holdon and Price, from staring open-mouthed at the disheveled, stern-faced man, with a revolver in each hand, looked at each other, and each read a plea in the other's eyes for deliverance, and a promise of co-operation as well, were it possible to pass intelligence under those two tubes of steel.

"You two," the intruder began slowly, "will not need to agree as to the division of the spoils. You have robbed and been robbed for the last time but one on this earth, and I propose to finish the work."

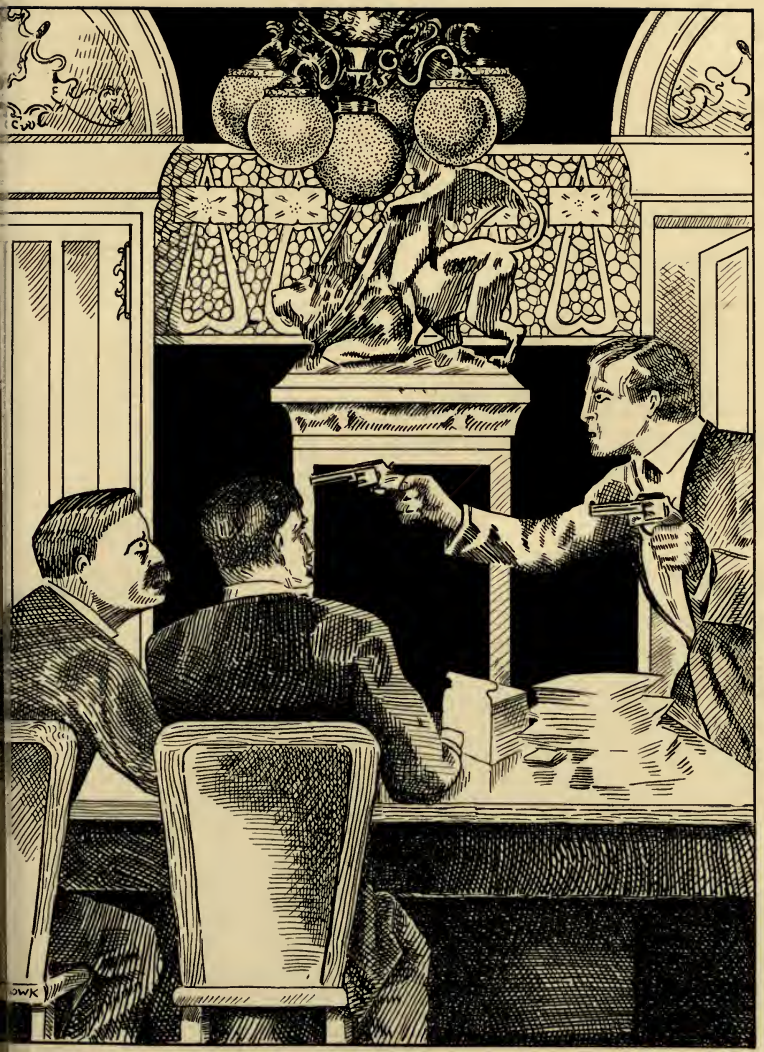
Again the two shot a furtive glance at each other. Holdon had huddled down in his chair while Price had leaned back with only his fingers on the table.

"I hope to God Price has a gun," Holdon thought, as he noted the position of his companion. If Charley Harris noted Price's drawing back from the table, he paid no heed.

"You, Mr. Holdon," the revolver in his left hand moved downward until it pointed at Holdon's third vest button, "are a more contemptible hound than this dog over here—straighten up, Price—your only hope of life lies in keeping your hands on the table."

Price brought his chair down with a thump and thrust his hands well out on the table.

"That's better," the same cool voice went on. "Now, Mr. Holdon, I was saying I consider you a more contemptible hound than this sneak thief over here. You took me into your foundry under a promise to help me perfect my machine. I laid my whole heart open before you; told you just what I wanted to do with the money my invention would bring me, how I wanted to make my father and mother happy and care free; all of this, I told you, and you smiled and promised to help me.



e first one of you to lift a hand will beat the other one to hell by about three seconds."—Page 448.

I went to work and within three days you had hired a detective to worm his way into my confidence, and when his report satisfied you that I really could build a successful moulding machine, you hired this whelp over here to rob me."

Harris paused and looked intently at Price, who had moved back once more until his fingers alone were on the table. He moved forward again before Harris deigned to proceed.

"But, Mr. Holdon," he went on with a short laugh, "there was a part of the story he failed to tell you. From the first, Price decided to rob both of us, and very nearly overreached himself. He told me he was building a machine and described mine so closely, thanks to your detective's ability to pump a boy from the country, that I quit your plant, and for months Price used your money and the detective, Martin, to hunt me. When he found me, he had a new story. His machine had proven a failure, and you insisted upon taking up my machine. I was to have one hundred dollars per month while building it, and a half interest in the patents when it was finished."

Holdon looked at Price, moistened his lips and asked:

"What do you want, Harris?"

"I don't want anything either of you have to give."

"I'll sign everything over to you, Harris, everything, and give you an agreement to buy the machine."

"No you won't. If you did, you'd hire another thief to rob me to-morrow."

Price had his fingers back on the edge of the table again, and as Harris was attending to what Holdon was saying, he thrust himself back a little farther, and, as their captor's vehemence while answering Holdon caused him to be less watchful, Price slipped his hands from the table, kicked his chair over and ducked to the floor. Once under cover of the table, it took him but a moment to draw his revolver. With the disappearance of Price, stillness fell upon the group. As Holdon looked up into Harris' eyes, he shuddered. The man was mad and unless Price had a gun——

"You might as well come out, Price," Harris' voice broke the silence, "I'm going to kill you, and unless you are praying, you're wasting time, and you, too, Holdon.

If you have any idea an honest God would listen to a dog like you, I'd advise you to pray."

"You don't intend to kill me, Harris?" He's mad, the magnate thought, even as he spoke. "You can handle madmen if you humor them." At that moment, he felt a pinch on his leg, and a hoarse whisper.

"Push back and duck like I did; I've got my gun."

"No use, Price," Harris answered. "You're a fool as well as a knave. I could kill you—just as easily now as I could——"

With an oath, Price pushed Holdon's chair back, and as the latter threw up his hands to save himself from falling and thus drew Harris' fire, Price got to his feet, but before he could level his gun, Harris had pulled on him with both guns. The ex-superintendent pitched forward upon the table, his revolver discharging in the air, then slid to the floor. His revolver fell upon a heap of papers upon the table. Holdon lay with his feet entangled among the rounds of the chair he had sat in but a moment before. The soft lights that had looked down upon the starting of so many successful ventures by this captain of industry lighted up a face made repulsive by the hand of fear that had written its telltale markings over all others his countenance had worn in life.

Harris for a time stood with the barrel of one revolver resting upon the table, the other pointed at the body of Price.

"So you are dead, are you, Price? And you, too, over there with your foot in the air. Well, I said I would; I told God I'd do it if He let me live until tonight, and it's over with."

A sigh of infinite sadness drawn from his tortured soul, escaped. His eyes fell upon the revolver that had fallen from Price's nerveless fingers.

"I wonder if it is loaded? If it is, why didn't he try to——"

He threw the barrel down and the loaded shells were thrown out. While picking them up mechanically, his mind began to shape a way out of the present situation. When he entered the suite that night through the secret passage Price had disclosed to him and for which he had furnished the keys—he had but one thought—

to kill those two men, then end his own life, and let the world judge when it had read the statement he had written and placed in his pocket. As he stood by the table, he had no thought of flight until in picking up Price's revolver, he had noticed that it was the same caliber as those he had used. Once the possibility of escape dawned upon him, he took up his guns and in feverish haste broke them, extracted the used shells, and thrusting them into Price's revolver, he threw it beside the huddled form on the floor. Hastily gathering the papers from the table, he ran to the grate and thrust them in, and as they burned, he extracted from the pockets of both men, all the papers he could discover, and fed the flames with them, and without a glance in the direction of the men upon whom he had taken vengeance, he walked out of the suite, out through that unused office in the next building, down two flights of stairs and was lost in the crowds upon the street.

As he went down the first flight of steps, after leaving the dark office, a woman, hearing him coming, crouched in a dark corner on the landing below and waited there until she was sure he had reached the street.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUT INTO THE NIGHT.

Out into the night, Charley Harris sped from the scene of his vengeance—a vengeance but half complete. He had burned the plans from which both his and Robinson's machines had been built, but the machines still existed, and these, too, must be destroyed before his work was completed.

As he crossed the river on his way to Robinson's shop, he dropped the moulding compound into the river, muttering: "Much good any machine will do them without that," and hurried on.

An hour later as he crossed the north branch of the river and turned south to catch a Madison street car west, he heard the clanging of fire gongs and halted as the fire fighters lashed their horses along the way he had just covered.

"They won't save it," he told himself. "They won't save it—I fixed it too well for that."

He jumped from the car a few blocks below his home and hurried on. His only fear was that Mickey might be there waiting for him. "What would he do if the cripple was there?" The blood madness upon him, he drew one of his revolvers, as he opened the door, and stealthily entered. With the revolver still in hand, he went into the room Mickey had occupied, but the cripple was not there. With a laugh of triumph he thrust the revolver into his pocket and went to search for every scrap of drawing and bit of the machine that might be among his effects. Picking up the first casting from the machine built in Holcomb's barn, he kissed and hugged it.

"You are to be broken into a thousand bits, my beauty," he murmured. "Yes, broken like they have broken me, and then the fire will turn you a beautiful red and you'll melt, melt, melt, and drop into hell, a

drop at a time, and fasten upon the souls of the men I sent there tonight."

Tenderly he wrapped the casting in its covering, and gathering the bundle he had prepared, hurried out into the night once more.

That morning three fires were reported, two of which we can account for. Robinson, seen by a reporter for an afternoon paper, gave the following statement:

My machine shop was burned by some one who desired to prevent the completion of an automatic moulding machine I was building. Yes, I was interested in the machine, but I am not at liberty at this time to give out the names of the other parties interested with me. I know it was deliberately burned. Since it has cooled off, I have been investigating and have found that the machine I mentioned was first broken up with a heavy sledge. Two men are ready to swear they heard some one using a sledge, but as machine shops often work night shifts they thought nothing of it. Who ever did it was either a machinist, or knew enough to turn on the lights and start some of the machinery, in order to give the appearance of regularity to his infamous work. No, I have not reported it to the other parties. I rather expected to hear from them before this; anyway, I don't want to do anything until I see them; they are prominent and will certainly push the investigation.

In the ruins of the second fire there might have been seen a pile of bent and battered iron and brass lying about midway of the broken walls. To the casual observer, this pile of iron would not stir the imagination, but could this unmoved observer have looked upon the same metal yesterday as it stood the concrete expression of genius wedded to more than living labor, the contrast would have been enough to stir the slowest blooded onlooker.

The owner of the building did not learn of the destruction of his property until notified by the insurance agency.

"I know but little of the man who rented from me. He was an inventor and seemed well-to-do. I visited the shop several times to collect rent and always found him busy. He gave me to understand that he was being backed by a wealthy man here in the city. No, I haven't seen him to-day; and the only reason I can advance for his not putting in an appearance is that he may have been out of the city last night and has not

yet returned." The owner and the reporter turned away from the smoking ruins.

A little before six o'clock that morning a man whose hands and face were smirched with oil, rust, and iron dust entered a boarding house in a manufacturing suburb of the great city.

"Can I get breakfast and a bed?" he inquired.

"Sure thing; working nights?" the proprietor asked, interested in the possibilities of securing a new boarder.

"No." The man turned a pair of heavy lidded eyes upon his questioner.

"Well, you look as though you worked last night," the landlord observed casually.

"Yes, last night I worked." The newcomer laughed, as he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves preparatory to washing. "But I don't do it as a rule. There was a piece of work that had to be done last night and I was sent out."

"What plant?"

The man at the wash bowl looked up quickly. "Oh, not here; it was up at Franklin Park. When I got through, they told me I could get a car home from here, but when I hoofed it in here, I made up my mind to rest up until to-night."

"Oh, that's it; well I guess you earned a rest all right if you walked down from the Park," the landlord observed and gave his mind to other things.

That evening shortly after supper, the man who had fixed things at the Park, handed the landlord a silver dollar and with a short good-by, left the house and dropped out of the world that had known him as a boy and man.

When John Smith shook hands with you yesterday, you did not know that he once answered to the name of Clarence Jennings, now did you? When that banker died in Cincinnati a few months ago and it was discovered that he had at one time in his adventurous life faced a vigilance committee in a western state, and that it had taken three names and fifty years to make him a pillar in the financial world, were you much shocked?

In Mammon's mills men change their names to fit their needs. And we have come to look upon such exposures as of little moment. To say that men change

their personality, their methods and their ambitions when they change names, might invite a heated argument; but I shall insist that some men have changed all of this when they took a new name and went forth into new environments. This I shall insist happened to Charley Harris, when he quitted the boarding house on the outskirts of Chicago and plunged into the darkness of a night that shall hide him from you and all who have known him, until such time as the iron hand of fate shall fall upon his shoulder and the voice of doom shall say, "Thou art the man."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FLY BOYD'S SUDDEN DEPARTURE.

When Charley Harris' footfalls ceased to sound in the dark halls of the building adjoining "Shifty" Smith's palace, the woman who had crouched in the darkest corner of the second floor landing stepped out and hastily climbed the next flight. Making her way to the door through which Holdon's suite was reached, she groped for the button the owner had had cunningly hidden in the side of the casing for the use of such as she. Time and again, she pressed the button.

"I wonder has he forgotten?" she whispered, and again tried the button.

Growing impatient, she tried the door and finding it yielded to her touch, entered the room and went on to the door leading into the Holdon suite. This door was not locked, so boldly and with something of resentment against the man whom she mentally accused of having left those doors open for her in order that he might not be disturbed, Fly Boyd entered and hesitated but a moment before going to the sitting room. As she paused at the doorway, she sniffed the powder laden air, then glanced at the grate in which the last flickering flames were issuing from a heap of twisted sheets of paper ash. From where she stood, neither of the bodies were in sight. Yet, into her very bones, there crept the chill of horror. Standing thus in the doorway, she searched out the far corners of the room and questioning the silence, the mystery of it all, was about to flee, when a memory of the man she had heard upon the stairs returned, and gave her courage to investigate. Stepping into the room, the floor on the opposite side of the long table came into view.

"My God, what is this?" she cried, as staggering to the table, she caught at it for support, her eyes fastened

upon the body of Holdon lying with the soft light beating into its staring eyes.

"He is dead! Dead! Dead! That man murdered him," she whispered, and began edging along the table to be farther from the body, and in doing so, her eyes fell upon the huddled form of Price lying close up to the table.

The woman drew back and clasping her hands to her head began to cry. For a little while, she walked back and forth near the doorway through which she had entered, uncertain what to do, whether to go away quietly and allow some one else to discover the tragedy, and thus escape notoriety, or to give the alarm to the police. From thinking of the notoriety that would come to her, and worse, if she should be discovered there, her mind carried her to the conversation she had had with Mamie. Standing where she could see both bodies, she looked long at them, her face hardening, her hands clinched at her sides.

"Why not, if he's dead, and through with it all, I might just as well." She paused. "Is he dead?" To determine this, it became necessary for her to examine the body. Slowly edging her way around the table, she fell upon her knees beside the body of her lover. "Yes, he's dead," she whispered. "Dead, and I am a widow." Getting to her feet, she ran from the suite, locking the doors behind her.

* * * * * *

"Mamie, Mamie, for God's sake, wake up!"

Fly Boyd stood over her maid's bed, shaking the girl as though her very life depended upon her being awakened instantly. Mamie, awakened, sat bolt upright, rubbing her eyes.

"Why, Flo—what in the world—is the house on fire?" she questioned.

"No, but the world's turned over since you went to sleep," the mistress began and hurried on: "Holdon has been murdered and another man with him."

"Murdered?" Mamie's eyes were wide. "Murdered? Flo, you didn't——"

"No, I didn't, you goose. But get up. We're going to pack up and get away just the same."

The girl looked questioningly at her mistress and

noting the flushed face and nervous twitching lips, was but half satisfied.

"You can tell me the truth, Flo," she insisted. "If you killed him, I know you must have had cause."

At that, Fly sat on the bed and gave the maid a brief outline of the evening's adventure, concluding:

"I don't know what put it into my head, but, from thinking of what we had talked over about that Michigan marriage, I got to thinking of Mickey and his baby; and the thought struck me that Holdon would be as good a name for the baby as any other, besides, I'd be doing Mickey a good turn and have my fingers on two shares of the Holdon estate."

Mamie, standing at the dresser, turned to stare at the woman sitting upon the edge of the bed.

"What is the matter, Mamie? You don't seem able to grasp the situation."

"I don't grasp the part our baby's got to play," Mamie protested, "though I do see where you can hold up the Holdon heirs for a million. Lord, Flo, you must have been born under a lucky star. Just think how they'll come across."

"And the baby will cinch it. Why, Mamie, can't you see how much stronger it makes my case?" The girl shook her head. "Well, it does. See here—you've got letters from me written from different places in Europe. I've got the same pen and the same ink I wrote them with. You hunt them up and I'll just drop in a line in each of them, telling about the baby. Let's see, it's about three months; that would bring it about right. Why, Mamie, I can write you how I left babe with the nurse, and went to—So-and-So's. There's dead loads of people over there who will swear to anything for a hundred dollars. I can tell you how sorry Mr. Holdon was that he had to go home without us. I can——"

"But you have forgotten Mickey. What's he going to say to all of this?"

"Yes, that's the one question; what will Mickey say? Say, Mamie, can you find him at this time of night?" the mistress asked.

"Why, it's past midnight, but I know where he was

going to stay to-night. Yes, I can get him if I don't get pinched."

"When you get pinched, shove some of this at the bull. He'll forget his duty long enough to take the bill to the light." Fly pressed some bills into the girl's hands and with a parting word to her to hurry, sat down to plan her work with Mickey. So absorbing was the theme her mind played with that she was startled when Mamie and Mickey entered her room.

"What's th' matter with th' kid?" the visitor demanded. "She," pointing a thumb over his shoulder at Mamie, "is either walkin' in her sleep or somethin', she wouldn't say nothin', only youse come erlong. Say, is th' kid sick?"

"No, Mickey, baby's asleep. I—I sent for you to tell you I'd adopt the baby."

"Gee whiz! is that so? Say, youse kin git me up in th' middle of th' night any old time."

"But, there's a condition, Mickey, that you may not care to agree to."

Fly, pale and trembling, hesitated to throw the last card in her hand into the scale. Mickey stood before her, his every faculty awake, and noting the woman's hesitancy, he hurriedly replied.

"They ain't no conditions I won't agree to t' see that kid fixed fer life."

"Are you sure?" the woman asked.

"Absolute," came the answer.

"Then you promise to forget anything I ask you to forget about the baby, to remember anything I want you to remember?"

"Say, quit kiddin' me. Ain't I told youse I'd do anythin' fer th' kid—er its mother?" he added softly.

Fly scrutinized him so closely that he became restless.

"Say, what sort of a lay-out is this, hey? I ain't used to bein' got up in th' middle of th' night jist fer ladies to set an' make eyes at me." He shifted from one foot to the other.

"Mickey, I don't know how to tell you the story so you will understand it, and unless you do and will agree to help me, why, I can't adopt the baby."

"Well, fer God's sake; what's the use ov me sayin'

it agin? Ain't I sed fire away; I'm yours truly?"

"Yes, I know, but there are so many—" she paused. "Say, Mickey, you know the baby's got to have a name." As he nodded, she went on hurriedly: "There's only one name I could give her, and that's Holdon."

The cripple jumped as though shot.

"Who ever put youse next," he quavered.

"No one put me next to anything, only if I adopt her, she's to be called Estella Marie Holdon."

Mickey sat down limp as a rag. Finally he looked up.

"Fly Boyd, are you th' devil, or am I dreamin'?" he demanded soberly.

"Neither, Mickey; we were discussing a pretty name for our baby."

"An' youse don't know nothin' 'bout th' kid 'ceptin' what I told youse?"

"No; how could I?" she questioned, puzzled at the change which had come over her visitor.

"An' youse, with nobody tellin' youse nuthin' 'bout th' kid 'cept what I tells, wants t' call it Steller Holdon?" His eyes big with wonder at it all, he stood clasping and unclasping his hands.

"Yes, Estella Marie Holdon."

"Then they is a God!" he exclaimed. "They is a God, an' I won't——"

"What in the world has my naming the baby got to do with God?"

"Heaps! heaps!" he answered. "Jist go ahead an' call her that an' I'll swear it's her name, an' I ought t' know, I ought t' know!" His voice sank to a whisper as he put a hand on Fly's arm and nodded his approval.

The woman before him, relieved of her fear, plunged into the story of what she had seen in Holdon's suite. Only once was she interrupted.

"I knows who let th' daylight into them devils, an' I seen youse go up them stairs an' shadowed th' joint till th' man as done fer them come down—but I lost him," came from Mickey, but that was all, and the woman could not induce him to say another word.

It was four o'clock when Mickey left the house with instructions to secure a ticket for New York and take the

first train. He had agreed readily enough when Fly laid her plans before him. Mamie was to go to a woman whom Fly had befriended many times and giving the baby into her care send them to New York by a round-about way, that morning, if possible. In the afternoon, Fly was to start for the same city. Arrived there, they were to take up quarters in a good hotel and await news from Chicago.

Mickey turned at the door. "I don't know as I kin go," he began in a hesitating voice. "Youse see, if th' man I thinks done fer them skunks last night, I ought t' stay an' try t' help him—he don't know no more'n a rabbit 'bout th' mertropolis, an' is jist as like as anything t' run right into a bull th' first thing. I guess——"

"But the baby, Mickey? We must get this business fixed."

"Yep, I guess youse is right, an' after this here night, Fly Boyd," he paused with lifted hand, "I ain't never goin' t' say a word against God; I had some doubts which was nacheral, seein' as how I bin bumped, but I'm all right now."

When he was gone and Mamie had started on her mission, Fly Boyd sat down to ponder over the conduct of Mickey.

"I wonder will I ever learn what it is behind this baby's coming into the world that he guards so closely? What did he mean anyway?" she asked, then gave her mind to the part she had set herself to play.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HUE AND CRY.

Holdon never permitted the keys to his suite above "Shifty" Smith's palace to remain in the hands of a janitor or care-taker. When he was in town, the woman who took care of the suite was summoned by phone and the owner remained in the apartments until they were in order, or if it was inconvenient for him to be present, his agent, Price, had to oversee the work. Price was well content with this arrangement, as it gave him undisturbed possession of the suite whenever Holdon was out of the city.

When Price had finally secured possession of Harris, he had planned to have the latter do all his drafting in this suite in order that he might have access to the work when Harris was at the shop. With this in view, he had shown Harris the secret entrance and supplied him with keys. Later, when Harris insisted that he could work on his drawings to better advantage in the quiet of his own rooms, or at the shop, Price had not asked that he return the keys, either because he feared to anger the mechanic or because he was too much occupied with his schemes to give thought to so small an item.

The third day of her father's absence came and with it brought a great fear to Beatrice and her aunt. Never before had the father left the city without telling the family when and where he was going.

"I'll call up Mr. Price. He will know. I'm sorry I did not do it yesterday."

"Or the night before, when your father did not come home," the aunt added.

Central reported that Mr. Price could not be gotten on the wire and was asked to ring again. Finally the girl gave up.

"Aunt, you don't suppose they have got track of Joel and were so excited they forgot to tell us when they left?"

"Oh, dear, don't ask me what a man does or why he does it. When you are as old as I you will have learned that it isn't the women who will, and do as they will, and that's the end of it—it's these men."

"But that doesn't help me now, really," the girl protested. "I am anxious—oh, I know what I'll do—I'll call up Martin."

"Yes, Mr. Martin. What is that? Not for three days? Price—yes, this is Miss Holdon. Wait a minute. What plans did father discuss with me? The last things he said? That he would go to the Art Institute with me yesterday afternoon. Not a word about leaving town? No, nothing about Joel. He would have told me."

The detective hung up the receiver and scowled at his reflection in the mirror. "Not like Holdon at all," he informed the reflection. "Now, I wonder if he's got somebody else on the trail of that good-for-nothing scamp, and they've put up a strong con talk and carried him off on a wild goose chase. Well," he concluded, "I'm under instructions from the house to hunt him up, so here goes."

Price's rooms were visited. The janitor and caretaker both insisted that the lodger had not been home for three days. Had he left the city? Would they open his apartments? There was fear of foul play. This suggestion added solely for effect. The apartments were opened and proved beyond a doubt that the lodger had not purposed going out of the city when he left them.

Next Martin visited Holdon's attorneys. Fanchett, the senior member of the firm, was all attention in an instant.

"Did you see the report of the fire on the North Side?" he asked, hastily taking down a file of papers.

"No, what fire?" the detective inquired; then added, "I don't get the connection."

"Then read that. Of course, it is understood that what I tell you is confidential, and when you have found Holdon my name is not to be used."

"Why, that goes without saying," Martin replied promptly. "You are his attorney, I am his detective, and if the truth was out, I suspect we would both discover

that some things we each think is known to no one else, is known as well by the other."

The lawyer smiled and handed over the paper. Martin read the interview Robinson had given.

"Say, this doesn't look good," he announced.

"Why?" Fanchett asked.

"Because I know a story, but this is no time to tell it. The thing I've got to do is to find Holdon."

"Have you inquired at the Eagle?"

"Yes, but there's one place I have not visited."

"On Monroe street?"

The detective nodded.

"Then it's the next place to visit," Fanchett advised, and added: "I will call up a couple of men who were with him that afternoon. Oh, by the way, do you know a certain woman on Michigan avenue?"

"Yes, I know her—but she's not in town."

"Well, if there isn't anything doing on Monroe street, go to her place, it's your next best lead."

A look of comprehension passed, and Martin said at parting: "If it isn't asking too much, would you mind staying here where I can get you on the wire, say for an hour?"

A half hour lated Fanchett was called to the phone. An agitated voice at the other end said:

"Go down to the Eagle—go as fast as you can. I'm at 'Shifty' Smith's—I've got to see you, and for God's sake hurry."

Fanchett ran out of the office, hailed a cab and hurried to the Eagle club.

What did that urgent message mean? Was it death he heard in the detective's strained voice? That woman. How often he had pleaded with his client to quit her, even if it cost him half his fortune to do it quietly.

Martin met him at the entrance and without a word hurried him upstairs.

"Well," the lawyer sat down.

"Hell," the detective fairly threw the word from him.

"Out with it."

"Then it's murder and suicide."

"Not the woman!"

"No, no woman; Price killed him."

"My God, man, not Price, his agent?"

"Yes, Price. Mr. Fanchett, I stayed there long enough to make up my mind—God, I shall never forget it. They have been there dead in that warm room three days at least."

The lawyer got up. "Martin, you say Price killed him; you infer that he then took his own life?"

"I would swear to it; the doors were locked; the two had been discussing the machine; I found evidence of that, the one Robinson says was broken up before his shop was fired."

"But, Martin, we must act now, at once. But how? How? Let me think."

"That's what I wanted you for. I locked the doors and left things just as I found them." He shuddered.

"You were right, Martin. Now, you will go and tell the chief, then phone to Black's. Ask the chief to send two good men with you and tell him we—mention our firm, Martin—tell him we don't want the papers to get at this until we have had time to prepare a statement. Tell Black's to send a trusted man to our office at once; make it strong, Martin. Then you and the two men go in at the back and I will phone you when we will arrive. I—I must see this thing, though God knows I would rather see anything else in the world. But I must see it. I can't believe Price killed him. He was too much of a coward. We need to go slow, Martin; God alone knows what complications may arise out of this—this—double murder."

Two hours later Fanchett's office was besieged by a dozen hungry newspaper men. Fanchett had assured the first to scent out the tragedy, that a statement would be given the press at 3:30 p. m., and with this the representatives of the near-decent papers had to be satisfied. Those who represented the unscrupulous, scare-head hunters had rushed into print with half pages given to blood curdling stories, alleging for cause the full gamut of crime, from gaming to women.

Inside, Martin, the chief of police and the three members of the firm had been struggling to get a statement in shape for the press. Fanchett alone, of those who had examined the bodies and their immediate surroundings, held out against accepting the murder and suicide

theory. The time was almost up, nothing had been settled. A clerk tip-toed into the room.

"Judge Terwill wants a word with you gentlemen; he says he can give you some light."

"Tell him to come in," Fanchett ordered, and added: "We've got to let that pack in pretty soon."

The judge, haggard and depressed, told the story of the meeting at which Holdon had publicly insulted his agent, and stated further that a porter at the Eagle had heard Holdon tell Price over the phone that he expected him, Price, to meet him at his apartments and settle up something or other. When the judge had finished, Fanchett surrendered, and the other members of the firm voted that he should make the statement for the press.

Martin left the office after the last reporter had been satisfied, himself dissatisfied with the evidence he had but a short while ago accepted as final.

* * * * * *

In the palatial home of the Holdon family there was greater grief locked in the heart of one woman that night than she had ever thought it possible to bear.

"Oh, aunt," she sobbed, "only to think that he was murdered in a quarrel over money—over money, when we had so much of it."

"Much or little, it's all the same," Aunt Nell replied, philosophically. "Men and women never get enough so that they won't quarrel over the next dollar they see."

"But think—think of him lying there three days, and we did not think enough of him——"

"Beatrice, why should you say that? You know we worried from the first, but we thought some business had called him away; be just to yourself. You will need to be strong and you are not going to help matters by exaggerating either side, his or yours."

"I know, I know, auntie, but what am I to do? They are not going to bring father home until to-morrow and I cannot live through this night. I cannot,—I cannot!"

"There, there, dear, cry, cry hard. Do anything, but try to think. If you could have your Socialist stoic with you now, he might help you."

This last was thrown out by Aunt Nell in the hope that Beatrice would resent it, and great was that lady's

astonishment when the girl threw her arms about her neck and cried:

"I do want him—I do, I do. Won't you send for him; tell him I am in trouble."

"Beatrice!" the aunt exclaimed in horror. "What would your friends thing of such a thing, of all——"

"I don't care; I want to talk to him if only for a minute."

"I won't——"

"But, you suggested it," the girl protested; "and if you don't send for him, I'll go——"

"Gracious heavens, child, have you—there, there, I'll send Honore over."

"Send Honore up to my room. I'm going up now." The girl tottered from the room and left a much perplexed aunt staring after her.

When Bulman received the note Beatrice had given Honore for him, he was sitting on his doorstep reading a third edition, alleging additional and startling information relative to the "Holdon Murder," this additional information consisted of an interview from Mr. Abner of the Holdon Company, relating his suspicions as to the cause of the murder.

"Hurry right back, Miss, and tell Miss Holdon I will be over as soon as I can change clothes; I've been tinkering around home, you know."

And over he went to be ushered into the great library by as sour a visaged body as ever attempted to divide her face between two expressions. Beatrice got to her feet as John was ushered in, the aunt following.

"Mr. Bulman, this is kind," she began, and that instant found both her trembling hands clasped in the hands of a wholesome man whose very person radiated sympathy.

"Don't say a word, Miss Holdon, not a word! How many times have you gone to Robert and others with your sweet presence and cheered them when they thought there was nothing left to life but death and ashes?"

"Oh, I am so glad you came. I was so afraid you would not." She looked past the man and seeing the look of disgust on her aunt's face, said to that lady: "Auntie, I want to talk to Mr. Bulman alone."

Aunt Nell bowed, and with one swift glance at the man, hurried from the room.

"You have—you know that my father was killed in a quarrel over money." The girl sank back into a chair, and John, pulling another up facing her, answered:

"I know your father was murdered, but, Miss Holdon, you must not allow your mind to dwell upon the causes any one may assign as a reason for his death at the hands of another man. You and I know he is dead. And you know he was a good father. But, out in the world there are a hundred men who will make money, or hope to, by giving some sort of story to the press. Then there are others who may attempt to get money through attacking his honor——"

"Oh, do you think so? Do you think they will? Isn't this—this enough?" she protested.

"Yes, more than enough, little woman, but it is apt to be just as I have stated, and I am telling you this now, at this hour, in order that your pride may arm you against a weakness that might be fatal."

"Yes, and then?"

"And then," he replied, measuring his words, "your father's memory, your memory of him, the things the world is to believe of him, will depend upon your bravery, your ability to meet every issue fairly, and fight for your father's good name against those who are to-day making bread and butter out of the senseless lies they mix with a bit of probability and feed a morbid public through the columns of a filthy press."

"And you think I shall have to fight for my father's good name?" There was nothing of tears, rather resentment in her voice as she went on. "Mr. Bulman, I know you did not like——"

"No, no, Miss Holdon," he protested, earnestly, "don't, I pray you, don't think I carry my warfare beyond the fair limits of an honest fight in the open. What I am telling you is not necessarily based upon anything I know or even suspect, but rather on the experience of the families of other rich men who have died without having had time to gather up the loose ends of their many interests. You may, and I hope to God you will, escape all of this, but if you value your father's honor above the money, the property he had, and I know you

do, then this is not a time for weeping; rather it is a time for gathering all of your reserve force to meet and master the problem this tragedy has brought into your life."

"I—I am glad and sorry you have told me this; isn't it enough for one day to learn this awful thing?" she asked with a pathetic quiver in her voice, as she looked into the worker's face.

"More than enough, more than enough, but, little woman, the whole load is really lighter than any part of it, and may be carried more easily to-day than to-morrow; for if you give way to-day to the grief common to all of us when death comes to one we love, and to-morrow some one attempts to put upon you another burden, you will find that you are already spent, that you cannot meet and conquer these things one at a time, as they spring upon you out of the dark. I cannot bring comfort to your sore heart, no one may do that, and the things most people will say to comfort you you will find unbearable, weakening, enervating. The thing I want to do for you is to make your pride arm you against every outside influence, make you true to yourself, your splendid womanhood, your clean heart, your best thought of your father. If I can do this, you will not cry 'What shall I do, what can I do?'; you will look life and its added responsibilities square between the eyes and fight for——" he hesitated.

"For my father's honor," she answered for him, and added: "You have accomplished one thing I did not believe possible of accomplishment. You have driven weakness from me; yes, and armed me." She sat silent a moment watching him, then asked: "Do you believe my father was dishonorable?"

Bulman met both her question and her narrowing eyes fairly as he replied:

"What I may have believed of your father has been swallowed up in the respect I have for his daughter, and as your friend I have forgotten anything and everything I ever knew or thought or heard about him. The only thing I know to-day in this relation is that practically every rich man has hundreds of secret enemies, that there are besides as many more professional blackmailers and parasites who are ready, for the sake of

profit, to suck honor out of a dead saint even though to do it they are forced to paint their own souls as black as the unlighted depths of hell. I know, too, that few men of great wealth die without members of their own families being found who gladly give aid and comfort to the hell's pack who are turned loose to rend and tear the mantle of honor the dead has left to the care of the living. I know this, Miss Holdon, and while I hope you may be spared, as a friend who has something of more worth to offer than tears and the maudlin miscalled sympathy of the friends one tries to shun in such hours as these, I come to you and ask you to justify my highest opinion of your womanhood, your courage, by being brave. And to be brave is to let your soul weep for your love while your heart stands at the door to your home armed against a hungry, wolfishly hungry, world of self-seekers."

When he had finished, Beatrice sat silently regarding the flickering play of the gas flames in the grate. So long she sat thus dry-eyed, with a hand upon either arm of her chair, that Bulman arose. Thinking he had offended beyond pardon, he was cudgeling his brain for some word to say before leaving, when she turned her face, resolute, calm and purposeful, to him.

"I did you grievous wrong," she began, motioning him to his seat, but he shook his head and stood cap in hand. "A grievous wrong," she repeated, "and if I can, I want to atone for it; I have been thinking, and in the few minutes I have sat here, a host of men and women have gone in and out my mind. They each have had a story. I never realized what each one of these stories must have meant to the woman who sat as I sit to-day, with death in her heart. I never thought how these stories of crime, of secret marriage, of other lines of social sin, of business dishonor must have wrung the hearts of those who loved. I know now. I know and I shall do my best to be worthy the confidence you place in me."

"Mr. Fanchett, Miss Holdon," a muffled voice at the doorway repeated the announcement, and John, taking the girl's hand in his, said:

"I know you will be brave, and you know I will do anything in my power to aid you."

The lawyer came through the doorway as John left the room.

"Miss Holdon," he began, "I am glad that I am not the bearer of our sad news."

She welcomed him, and inviting him to be seated, awaited his message.

"I would not have come to you this evening, but, well, after office hours Mr. Sample—Mr. Sample is a very estimable gentleman, and a member of a reputable firm of attorneys. As I said—" he looked at the girl and noted a heightened color, and a strange brightness in her eyes—"as I said, Miss Holdon, Mr. Sample came to me—he had just received a telegram from New York asking him, no, instructing him, to take charge of a very—ahem—a very important case against the estate, and he asked me for a plain, straightforward answer. Would we listen to his client with a view to a—a settlement out of court, or would we fight?" Fanchett pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, but forgot the purpose for which he had extracted it, when Beatrice asked:

"And what is this case?"

"Well, well, now Miss Holdon, I only came to you as a matter of form. You see, I told him I'd have to see you before I gave him a final answer, and, anyway, I wanted time to telegraph to Battle Creek and get a reply, all of which I did, and as I said, I came to you as a matter of form. In fact, I came so that, however this case may go, we could say we consulted our client, for you are now our client, you know."

Still holding the handkerchief, Fanchett remembered his purpose and blew vigorously.

"Yes, to have everything ship-shape. I told him I would have to see you. He grumbled a lot, said the papers would give a lot for the release of the story——"

"What story?" the girl demanded, and as she asked the words of Bulman: "A hundred secret enemies and as many blackmailers and parasites," flashed before her.

"Why, the story that your father; now my dear young lady don't faint, or—or——"

"For heaven's sake, tell me! Do you think I am made of iron?"

"Well, well, I beg your pardon, but coming as it has immediately——"

Beatrice was on her feet and one of them was stamping, even before his lips formed the words:

"Tell me and have done."

Fanchett squared his shoulders, shot a look, not unmixed with wonder, from underneath his bushy brows.

"Well, the story is this: Your father was married to a Miss Wiebcldt in Battle Creek, Mich., a little over a year ago, and his wife is now in New York with her baby. That's the story, and while I will admit the case against the estate looks strong——"

"What do they, she and the lawyers want?"

There was another look shot at the girl, this time of growing wonder and appreciation.

"They want us to agree to meet for conference. Otherwise they will give the story to the papers and attempt to make their case in the courts."

"And your advice is——" she paused.

"Why, my advice is to fight. Of course, they would put their strongest cards in the hand they showed us today, but things are not always just as good as they look. Besides, a conference means that we recognize that they may have—have—well, have a fighting chance. And as senior counsel of our firm, after conference with the other members, I came to lay the case before you, in the absence of your brother, and strongly urge that you sanction our going ahead with a searching investigation, and as good a defense as we can put up. Of course, it is probable she will get——"

"What is due her," Beatrice answered for him. "And you will tell her attorney that the day after the funeral, if she will attend——" Yes, there was a dry little sob, but she went on. "Tell her attorney I shall not set the time of the funeral until I hear from——"

"But, my dear girl, this is madness. Why, we have put Martin and another man on the case; surely you don't mean——"

"I mean to defend my father's honor if it takes the whole of his property, and then——"

"But, I must protest. If all these unmarried widows of rich men—no offense Miss Holdon—if all of them, a tenth part of them, got their dues——"

He was interrupted. Beatrice had walked the length of the room and as she turned back, said:

"You will please recall your detectives and give this woman's attorney the assurance he asks. If she is not my father's wife, we can prove her falsity without having another full page in every newspaper in the country. If she is my father's wife, she shall have her rightful place here."

"But—I protest."

"And I insist. You will either carry out my wishes in this matter to the letter or you may prepare to turn my father's interests over to——"

Fanchett did not wait for her to finish.

"Your wishes are law, Miss Holdon, law, as binding upon me as the laws of the Medes and Persians were upon the subjects of that kingdom, but I trust they may not be as unchangeable."

Bowing himself out he was met in the front hall by Aunt Nell.

"Well, sir, did you see him?" she inquired.

"No, I saw her," the lawyer replied, shortly.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. ABNER PREPARES TO GIVE BATTLE.

The morning after Moses Webster's interview with Mr. Abner, that gentleman had regained his wonted calm and dignified hold upon the forces he guided in the battle for business. For a time the young man's denunciation weighed upon him, even after business hours, but he threw it off, much in the same manner the first murderer is said to have attempted to lay the foundations for an alibi with his God.

"A lot he knows about business, and less about those rabid unionists, I guess, or religion. Now that was a queer notion he had, another freakish outcropping of the 'golden-rule-in-business' idea. Well, I'll have to let him go; it wouldn't do to keep him on, after what happened to-day." This as he lay courting sleep.

When he arrived at the office he took a hasty look in the direction of Moses' desk, and seeing that young man with his face boring into his books, he passed on hurriedly. Entering his office, the secretary and timekeeper were summoned. Orders were issued that Moses Webster's name should leave the payroll that night.

The secretary, a good friend of Webster's, was much perturbed, and reluctantly went about his task. In the end, he returned to his office wondering how a young man with a family could take a discharge without notice so coolly. The news spreading through the office building, that the confidential clerk had been "fired," not a few offered condolence. To all, Moses had but one reply.

"Yes, I got what the boys call 'the can,' and am going to quit the city."

Abner had hardly finished with Moses when he sent word to Moran that he was wanted in the office. The foreman responded without a thought of what impended.

"Mr. Moran," Abner began, after he had kept the

foreman waiting, cap in hand a full ten minutes. "I have read your report on the loss of that twenty-ton casting last Tuesday; I have also examined the reports of the moulders and furnace men, handed in by the assistant superintendent." He paused, took up a packet of long envelopes and began leisurely to examine them.

"And I hope I made it plain in my report that we have had a less percentage of loss on both light and heavy work than the average plant using a like equipment," Moran spoke confidently.

"I noticed that you sought to convey that impression, but it don't satisfy me. I mean, I am not running this business on other men's averages. If other employers keep incompetent help, that's their lookout. I want the work done in this plant to count. And that on the right side of the ledger. Take this piece of work, under your direct supervision, and all the time used in producing that cast and all the time it has taken to break it up is just so much dead loss."

"But, Mr. Abner, there never was a moulder who didn't lose work; and your assistant superintendent told me the figure given on those four castings was made to cover the loss of one and still leave the usual profit."

"And if the one had not blown out, the profit would have been that much greater," the employer finished, tapping the desk.

"I am sure I selected the very best men in the shop——"

"And this is the result," Abner exclaimed, triumphantly. "This is the result."

"No, sir, it did not result from any fault of the men."

"Then you admit the fault was yours?"

"Yes, if it is a fault to obey the orders of a superior, it was my fault."

"That will do, Mr. Moran; that will do. I want a foreman in your department who is less apt to make mistakes, and one, sir, who when he does make a mistake, will not attempt to——"

"If I may finish that sentence for you, Mr. Abner, I shall be a thousand times obliged to you. You want to fire me and have labored over a very poor excuse, at great length." Moran walked over to the president's

desk and looked down on that little man with a righteous wrath burning through his blackened face.

Abner looked up quickly, wondering was he in for another tongue lashing, and mixed with that query in his mind was another. What sort of men were these he was dealing with? Aloud he said:

"The reasonableness of the excuse must rest with me; you could hardly be expected to admit its justice, but, you did finish what I had to say to you. To-night you will be relieved of your duties as foreman. If you care to go on the floor as a moulder, I will see what can be done."

"No, thanks, I know when I've had enough."

With these words, the foreman left the room and went back to his work.

"I was a fool to let him go back among the men; I should have fired him on the spot. The next one won't fare so well." Mr. Abner jammed his pen into the shot and scowled at the calendar.

Yancey took the news to John Bulman shortly before noon, having got it straight from Carson.

"I have been looking for it," was John's comment.

"And I haven't. Why, man alive, the plant is almost solidly union and the boys were getting ready to make a demand for a closed shop all the way through."

"And he knew it." John laid a hand on Yancey's arm. "You haven't been in this fight long enough to know all its ins and outs. He knows almost as much about the work of the unions as we do—not all of the labor spies are men sent from a regular spy furnishing agency. Right here in this room there are at least two men, members of our union, who are supplying Abner's assistant superintendent with every thread of information they manage to pick up at our meetings or from the men."

"I can hardly believe it, John. How could a man at your elbow, who called you brother, and accepted the material advantages the organization gives him, consent to play so mean a part?"

"God only knows, I don't; but I do know there are such whelps in practically every labor organization."

"Well, that being the case, I suppose I'm billed out," Yancey replied, resignedly, just as Wilson came up.

"Hello, Yancey." He turned to John. "Hear about Moran getting the boots put to him, John?" The new arrival looked anxious.

"Yes, I guess it's not news any longer," John answered.

A man working near Yancey's office called out: "Oh, Yancey, the phone," and the word was passed along.

Yancey came back where John and Wilson were engaged in an animated conversation. John smiled as he looked into the foreman's big, square-jawed, honest face.

"Now, what?" he questioned.

"We are both invited to the office," Yancey replied, and Wilson whistled.

"Guess you were right, John. Maybe I better get back so as to answer my call when he's through with you. Say, won't there be a little piece of something tore off here if this keeps on?"

"If what keeps on?" The assistant superintendent, a slim, lean-faced Pittsburg importation, had slipped up behind the three. Wilson whirled on him.

"This slippery weather," he answered, and strode away.

When Yancey and Bulman faced Abner, he said:

"I called you men in together because I understand that you," his pencil pointed to Yancey, "have not made a protest against this man's inflammatory utterances among the hands. I have had any number of complaints from the decent men in your department, and I have waited, Mr. Yancey, to hear of your taking this matter up, as I certainly expected you would." Yancey bowed slightly, while John, remembering his experience at Nixon's, sat smiling.

"Well, what have you to say, Mr. Yancey? You certainly knew this man had been engaged in stirring up discontent among our hands. In fact, I have it on what seems to be quite good authority that you have listened to his anarchistic mouthings, and——"

"Will you allow me to say a word, Mr. Abner? It may simplify matters a great deal," John added explanation to question and awaited a reply.

"I—I would much prefer to settle the matter under discussion with Mr. Yancey; he ought to be able to——"

"Hang himself," John blurted out, "because he happens to be a friend of mine and would neither lie nor state the truth in a way to hurt my feelings."

Yancey looked his gratitude and was on the point of answering, when Bulman went on:

"Mr. Abner, you do not need to mince words nor frame up excuses in order to get rid of me. I am only a hand here, and you would not need to call me into your office; you didn't call me in on my own account, did you? Of course not; Yancey is the man you are after—oh, yes, you want me, too, but it's Yancey you want now. But I'm going to tell you that you'll have to hunt some other excuse. Yancey is not a Socialist; he doesn't believe in anything political, but your dear Republican party. As for his listening to me, I will have to admit that he has, but he nor any other man ever heard me talk Socialism during work hours, and this foreman of yours, happening to be one of the few old line partyites who still believes in political liberty and free speech, has listened to me and been very much disgusted with my arguments; still he listened. Now, if you can convince him that it is necessary to the preservation of the American democracy for all workers to surrender their political convictions at the door to your plant, why, without doubt, he will see to it that I am the last disrupter ever allowed in his department."

When John had finished, Mr. Abner straightened up.

"Your flippancy will not save you, my man, and I am inclined to think I might dispense with your presence, that is, if Mr. Yancey can get along without his attorney;" the sneer that accompanied the thrust made Yancey wince, but John just sat and smiled.

"Well, sir, do I have to repeat my desire that you leave?" the president demanded, well-nigh beside himself with anger, as he observed Bulman's cool demeanor.

"But you certainly have forgotten something, Mr. Abner," John insisted.

"I will forget——"

"And I would remind," John laughed. "Remind you that you have not disposed of me. To allow me to return to the machine shop with my case in its present status might mean a further contamination of your virtuous, patriotic help. And if I quit this room without

first having been discharged, my duty to you, my employer, would leave me no choice but to return to the work I left unfinished. This being the case, Mr. Abner, don't you think it would be best for you to have one of the tale-bearers from the shop and another good safe man accompany me and see to it that I pack my kit and get out without attempting to blow anybody or anything up?"

Yancey, in deep water himself, could not hide the grin that spread over his face as he watched the two men. John, cool, good humored, and in every way master of the situation, facing a little man on nettles and plainly showing his discomfort. When John had finished, he stood hat in hand waiting the decision of his employer. The last named gentleman fumbled among some loose papers on his desk, coughed and made up his mind. Taking a speaking tube from its holder, he called, "Williams, Williams," and waited.

Williams entered and without looking up, Abner said: "Williams, go out with this man and see that he gets his tools and other traps. As you go out, tell Lowry to make out his time and see that he gets it cashed."

When they were gone, he turned to Yancey, but was forestalled by the latter's saying:

"It's entirely unnecessary for you to take up time with me, Mr. Abner. You have discharged three men within two days, for a reason known to both of us. And you won't need to discharge the fourth on your list. If you'll just call the secretary in and give him to understand that I've resigned and want the same treatment Bulman is to get, you'll greatly oblige me."

"But, I did not intend——" Abner sputtered, and was cut short.

"Your intentions I have no desire to discover at this time; you have my resignation; I will not work another hour under you. I believe in discharging men for cause, and I do not believe in lying about the——"

"Do you accuse me of lying?" Abner demanded, indignation written all over him.

"I accuse you of attempting to job me over the shoulders of a better man; I'm going out to get my tools, and

by the time the men knock off I'll be in the office and shall expect a settlement in full."

We have said that Abner was a better handler of men, a better industrial general than either Price or Holdon. He is, but the men he has been weeding out are not the ordinary "hands." If he is once safely rid of the few "men" he had marked, he will prove his title well bestowed.

It is the "man" among the "hands" who is always marked, bear that in mind. It is always the fighter for a man's rights in the industrial battle whose name graces the "blacklist." And it is always the lick-spittle, tale-bearer, liar, hypocrite and me-too whose welfare is the concern of our goo-goo apologists for scabbery and Pinkerton espionage over labor. Abner, manager of the Holdon Company, and of its sister corporations, president, is not asleep. There are a dozen men or more in this one plant who are almost as courageous as these men he is discharging—and he must be rid of them.

Will the "hands" at Holdon's rise in revolt when these twelve "men" are put aside? Will they?

Remember, an injury to one is not yet felt to be the concern of all, even in the ranks of organized labor.

The infamous blacklist bears witness that thousands of men have been and are being denied the right to live by the exercise of skill, dearly bought in the mills, mines and factories of this land, simply because they fought for the advancement of a principle. And in these mills, mines and factories other men, union men, to hold their jobs, forswear the principle their blacklisted brothers fought to uphold, make peace with the scab, sit unmoved in the presence of Pinkerton spies, and insist that they are saving the world of labor from degradation.

What will the "hands" do? A handful of men in the various departments will do their utmost to induce the "hands" to go on strike; should they succeed in taking the hands out with them a few hired thugs, a few broken windows, a street fight or two, then a prostituted court would issue the ready-made injunction and the unions involved would have to set a watch on their membership to keep them in line, another watch on the scabs, another for spies, and finally appeal to labor as a whole to finance the strike. In the meantime, the gentlemanly agents of the

employer would get busy. First, priests and preachers would be reached in order that moral suasion might be brought to bear upon the misguided, though righteous among the hands. Next, these same gentlemanly agents would hunt high and low to discover an official or two among the unions who might be moved by bribery. Hired liars and leprous lawyers in swarms would surround the hands; jealousy, distrust, fear, want, hunger, religion, politics, patriotism, property interests, all centering their fire upon the "hands," the best they would dare to hope would be a drawn battle. A victory in wage increase, accompanied by as great an increase in living expenses, is the history of all successful labor struggles. The history of labor's defeats is indeed pitiful. But what will the hands do?

Mr. Abner is prepared for battle, and a thousand Mr. Abners are preparing for, are prepared or are engaged in battle with their hands as you read this.

Read the story, any story of labor's struggle, from Homestead to McKees Rocks, and aside from local coloring, they are practically identical.

In Mammon's mills the miller sets the toll each shall pay who brings grist to be ground.

And Mr. Abner is ready for battle.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THEY ACCEPT.

The funeral of the Honorable Horace Holdon was featured by the press as one of the most notable in a decade.

In an eastern city another funeral was held the same day, the funeral of a man who has been charged with two crimes, and this funeral was also "played up" in order that the story of the Holdon murder might be retold as "news."

When the women of the Holdon household returned from the cemetery it was to find a telegram from New York.

"Mrs. Holdon is very ill; will wire again to-morrow.
"J. D. Downie, M. D."

Beatrice read the message and handed it to her aunt without comment.

"The strumpet, ill, indeed! I tell you, Beatrice, that woman is an impostor." Aunt Nell ended by throwing the message on the floor and putting her foot on it.

"But, aunt, you know Mr. Martin reported that he had found the record of the marriage license; also the janitor who took care of the church——"

"I thought you told me yesterday that they were married at a parsonage?" Aunt Nell snapped out.

"Yes, but it happened this janitor was at the parsonage, not at the church. Mr. Martin says he described both quite accurately," the girl replied in a tired voice.

"And so you intend to take that filthy thing in here, when she recovers from her illness?" The scorn of the elder woman cut deep, but the girl ignored it as she replied:

"If she was good enough for my father to marry, she is good enough to have her rights in the estate. If I cannot live with her——"

"Yes, if you can't live with her, what then? Marry that cad who's been snooping around here for a year?"

"To whom do you refer?" the niece asked quietly, but there was anything but quietness in her eyes.

"To Charles Augustus; who else?"

"That will do, aunt. At any time it would be, well, presumptuous, let us say, but at this time, aunt, aunt, I haven't merited this." The girl covered her face with her hands and began to weep.

"You haven't merited what, I should like to know? To hear you talk one would think that your own father's sister had no more rights in this house than a stranger." Aunt Nell lifted her voice to a shrill pitch as she went on. "When I called Charles Augustus a cad, I meant it. And what's more, when he called here the other evening, I told him as much. Do you think I am blind? Well, I'm not, and neither am I deaf. I heard him not two weeks ago telling Hammond he had you broke to the bridle and that as soon as he had the thing cinched he'd see to it that the female chestnut of the family, who was already cracked, got hers."

During this recital Beatrice had dried her tears and sat drinking in every word.

"Did he really say that, or were you having a nap?" she asked in an awed voice.

"Nap, your grandmother! I don't nap when young men are around, or old ones either."

"If it will," Beatrice selected her words carefully. "If it will relieve your mind and in some measure restore me to your better thoughts, I will tell you. I never intended to marry Mr. Wetherby, even should he ask me."

"Thank the Lord, that's off my mind. That is, if you really mean it?" She cast a glance of suspicion in the direction of Beatrice, then turned her eyes to the ceiling in silent thanksgiving.

Aunt Nell had developed a deep interest in the Holdon estate, and had written a brother and sister that, if they came on to the funeral, she had no doubt Miss Holdon would, through her influence, do the handsome thing by them. She had added that, without doubt, Joel was dead, and the property would be divided.

The clan had arrived and in time for the last sad

rites. At the moment Mrs. Bishop had given her opinion about the new Mrs. Holdon, the brother had stood within earshot in the hall, and in his righteous indignation against this woman who would claim a widow's dower, and this baby who would suck up so great a part of the estate if it did not with its puny hands hold the entire property away from the hungry heirs there assembled, he had fairly groaned aloud. He was still standing there, and occupying as little space as possible against the wall, when Aunt Nell again gave voice to the subject uppermost in her mind.

"Really, my dear, I should like to know," the speaker brought her eyes from the ceiling, "once for all, are you going to be fool enough to recognize that woman and her brat?"

"Stop right there, aunt. My father's child, my sister, is not a brat, and besides," Beatrice had arisen and was about to leave the room.

"Your father's child?" the other taunted. "A likely story. It's some brat picked out of the gutter and foisted upon you in order to rob us of our property."

Beatrice turned. "Our property?" she repeated, questioningly.

"Yes, our property. When your father died intestate the millions he left belong to his family, and this interloper—this——"

"I have heard quite enough of this, aunt. If you and all the other relatives are going to begin to fight for the spoils before the grave is sealed, I shall have to ask you to—to—leave me. I cannot——"

"You cannot play into the hands of that adventuress fast enough," the other almost shrieked as the girl ran out of the room and plumped into her Uncle Walter, who had gradually drawn nearer to the door during the interview.

Beatrice ran to her rooms without stopping to acknowledge the profuse apologies Uncle Walter offered for having just at that moment halted at the door uncertain whether to go in or not.

"Oh, my poor father," she cried upon bended knees by the big chair he used to sit in when she could inveigle him into visiting her sitting room. "They are here, not out of respect for you, but because they want

your money. And Uncle Walter—I wouldn't have thought that of him."

As the clock ticked off the minutes the girl, sore pressed, poured out both tears and prayers for guidance. Her father's lawyers were against her—her own flesh and blood as well—and all against the woman who had married her father as well. Every one to fight. How she wished the mother and baby were there to give her courage, or drive her to despair; any way, she would hold out for the wife and her little sister against them all, no, not all. With a glad cry, she sprang to her feet. John Bulman was not against her. Had he not warned her, urged her to be brave?

She would see him and at once, if he were to be found. A little note written and folded by nervous fingers, a call on the house phone and a maid hastening away as though her life depended upon it, then a restless nerve-consuming wait. Finally, unable to remain inactive longer, Beatrice went downstairs and as she reached the front hall, saw Aunt Nell at the door.

"No, you are mistaken, you were not sent for," Mrs. Bishop was saying and a voice on the outside replied:

"Madam, it is you who are mistaken: Here is the summons I answer." Bulman held Beatrice's note toward the keeper of the gate. It was snatched from him and torn into bits.

"That for your summons; the girl is clearly beside herself, and it is high time her relatives put a stop to——"

"Mrs. Bishop, will you please step aside?" It was not a question, but a command, and Mrs. Bishop, after one frightened glance at the girl's set face, fairly flew up the stairs and into her apartments.

"Mr. Bulman," Beatrice held out both hands. "I am more glad to see you than I can tell, and I want to apologize——"

"Not at all, not at all." Their hands still clasped. "I don't mind, and you wouldn't if you knew the overtopping reason for it all." He was led into the library.

Excusing herself, Beatrice went to the doors and carefully closed them one after another.

"They have not begun already?" the man protested,

and was answered with a nod and a blush of shame as the girl turned back to him.

For two hours this man of the people listened, advised, dissuaded and encouraged the woman. At the end of that time they had decided to present to the attorneys' a proposition, which if accepted, would give them time to prosecute the search for Joel, rid the estate of the several pieces of property then used for questionable purposes, and at least satisfy the brother and sisters of the deceased for a time. It also provided for Beatrice holding the residence until such time as the court should decide that the son's interest in the estate need no longer be considered.

When it had been roughly drafted by Bulman Beatrice asked:

"Will they sign it?"

"The widow will," John answered, soberly.

"And the others?"

"The others, too, if they know what's good for them. You see," he added, "the way matters stand, they are not sure of anything; there are so many complications. I believe they'll grab at the twenty thousand each, and hope to find some way around the waiver, should anything else turn up."

"I ought to be insulted when you talk that way about my relatives"—a sad little smile came to her lips—"but I am not. Your talk this evening has been a tonic to me."

"And I have been paying a debt." Bulman looked at his watch. "Nine o'clock; land alive, I had no idea it was so late."

"Is it? Why, so it is!" She stood facing him. "What are you doing; still in the shop—our shop?"

"No, I was overworked and am taking a much needed rest."

There was banter in his tone.

"Out of work again, Mr. Bulman? I am sorry. How would you like to work for me?"

"Tip-top," he replied, and on the way home, asked himself what she could have meant.

When Lawyer Fanchett called by appointment at the house the day after Bulman's visit, the first thing he said was:

"I want to congratulate you upon the stand you took regarding your father's widow. The evidence is accumulating and in her favor." Beatrice smiled wanly.

"Pretty hard lines for you, eh, Miss Holdon?" he began, and hesitated. "But, you are as brave as—as a woman ought to be. Now, if you'd broken down, we'd made a mess of it, I know we would. Why, Linkenfelter was furious, positively so, when I went back and told him we were not to fight."

Silently Beatrice had pushed the agreement she had rewritten across to him. Mechanically he picked it up and immediately it came under his eyes he was repeating, "I told him we were not to fight," and then, "Good heavens, what is this, a will? No."

The girl watched him closely as he read, but made no comment. When he had finished, he turned back and began all over again.

"Will they sign this? Your relatives, I mean? Have you consulted them?" he demanded, and before she could answer, asked: "Did you draw up this paper?"

"I had the help of a friend," she replied.

"And a level-headed one—one who knows something of the entanglements we have to unravel. By the way, how did you know about these several pieces of property?" Tapping the paper with his knuckles, the lawyer observed her narrowly.

"My friend knew." A blush of shame dyed her cheeks, and she bent her head until she could only see his shoes.

"Your friend knows enough, evidently," he put in, with some warmth.

"Yes, enough to be a true friend."

"As a rule," he began, "I do not believe it good policy to fix hard and fast conditions of this sort, say like these selling orders, but in view of your stepmother's past life; do you know of that, too?" he questioned.

"Yes." The answer seemed to be drawn from her with her own heartstrings. The man looked at the shrinking girl and over his face there came a new expression, an expression of approval, as he said:

"I shall urge the carrying out of this agreement, and I have no doubt that Mrs. Holdon will be glad to sign it. The sale of the property in that case would be a matter

easily disposed of, and the creation of the trust fund out of the proceeds for carrying on your project for the children will be easy. There's one thing you forgot, a provision for the expense attached to the search for Joel. We should include that."

"I did not forget that," Beatrice corrected. "I want to bear that expense."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" the lawyer sputtered. "The estate shall bear the expense. I shall note it down in this most entertaining document." He smiled and the girl nodded assent. "Now about the relatives; have they been making demands upon you?"

"No, not demands."

"But, rather blunt insinuations, eh? I'll tell you frankly, Miss Holdon, three of them have hired attorneys, and there are others to follow. Now, I'm going straight to the office and have their attorneys over. I'll lay this document before them and tell them flatly that unless they accept all of the conditions you have named, we will tie the estate up in a neat little package and they won't get a cent. There is no doubt as to the outcome. We have plenty of funds on hand to pay them, and if you will draw up a check for forty thousand, I will see that it goes through and you will be relieved of this much of your burden."

Beatrice drew her check book from the table drawer, and asked as she held it in a trembling hand, "Have I a right to—to——"

"Certainly, you have a right. Did you suppose we intended or that the courts could, tie up your father's estate so that you or your agents could not get funds to meet your every-day needs? Why, if you want to realize on a check for one hundred thousand, I'll see that the money is forthcoming."

"Thank you, I feel much better; I really thought everything would be——"

"Involved in litigation," he finished for her, with a broad smile.

She bent over the check book. "The largest check I ever drew, and, oh, how I wish I—we had Joel here."

"Yes," Fanchett replied in a very deliberate way, his face expressive of anything but enthusiasm as he took the check.

"Now, unless there's something further you want to say to me, Miss Holdon, I am going back to the office. By the way, with your permission, I'll get those lawyers, both the relatives' and Mrs. Holdon's, on the phone and have them there when I get back."

"There is one thing I'd like to have your opinion on." The girl spoke slowly and with great effort, as Fanchett hung up the receiver and announced: "They'll be there."

"Don't you think I ought to have an agent, a good, reliable man, to look after the details so long as I am supposed to be the head of affairs?"

"Of course," the reply came with emphasis.

"And may I select my own agent? A man I have known for years, one who is the soul of honor and——"

"If he's a business man, yes," Fanchett explained. "There's a thousand loose ends to be picked up, a lot of property to be taken care of, and it needs a man of business. Now, I have in mind an excellent man for the place——"

"But, you forget, Mr. Fanchett, that you have admitted my choice is to be considered."

"Well, yes, now, who is he?"

"Mr. John Bulman."

"John Bulman, John Bulman. I've heard that name before. Well, we will discuss this agent proposition later." Mr. Fanchett held out his hand.

"No, we won't discuss it later. Here's his address. You will please notify him that he has been appointed to look after my interests in the estate, at a salary of—of——"

"But, my dear lady, I must protest that we, your attorneys, should have the right to examine this man, this Mr. ———, what was it? Yes, Bulman. Unless you are absolutely sure of his good judgment, his ability, his honesty, in which case of course——"

"Of course, I would have the right to name him. Well, I have every right to name him, Mr. Fanchett. I have every reason to esteem Mr. Bulman. You said if I had broken down you would have made a mess of the case; you have been pleased to tell me that if we can get my father's widow and the others to accept the terms I offer them, we will be saved a world of trouble. Well, Mr. Bulman saved me from breaking down. It was he

who advised me to protect my father's honor by keeping this woman out of the courts; it was he who pointed out that father's brother and sisters would accept a lump sum now in preference to the uncertainty of getting as much after litigation; it was he who insisted that the woman and baby are more apt to be impostors than not, but that we could not afford to quarrel with them now; it was he who pointed out the way by which I might retain my home here and at the same time be free to investigate this woman's claims, and that without materially injuring her or her right to finally take possession of the property; it was he who suggested asking the court to sanction our plans upon the ground that no proof that Joel is dead has been discovered, and we should have a reasonable time in which to ascertain his fate. Finally, it was he who, knowing my father owned these pieces of property, at present used," she hesitated, "he suggested their immediate sale and the disposition of the proceeds."

"And this man—" the lawyer began.

"And this man, John Bulman, gave me courage and advice worth more than the millions father left for others to fight over, and I want him to help carry out the things he planned for me."

"Who is he?"

"My agent, if you please."

"Very well, we'll call that settled. I will notify him and make the salary, say, two hundred dollars per month. Of course," he added, misunderstanding the expression on Beatrice's face, "if he is of as great value in an executive capacity as your—your recommendation would imply, we might make him one of the administrators of the estate also, and increase his salary accordingly. But I must go, positively, I must. Those claimants' lawyers will be anxious. Don't be surprised if I call you up in an hour."

The hour Beatrice Holdon sat with the phone before her on the library table was short indeed. For in that hour she had built and furnished a new home for John Bulman, and saw the fund for the defense of working children beginning to bear fruit. The bell rang its tiny silver note. She looked at the instrument, then as it rang again, pushed it away, with something akin to dread written upon her beautiful face. Again the bell

rang. With a sudden cry of protest, protest against the possibilities of disaster to her hopes that lay within the moment, she took down the receiver.

"They accept, both for the widow and the relatives. Say, their lawyers were not overly well pleased, but to refuse would have have put them in such bad light. And about Bulman. Are you listening? Yes, well, Linkenfelter knows him."

"And what does he say?" The girl's voice was so low Fanchett asked her to repeat. Then answered:

"Oh, he says Bulman will do. Says he will take charge of him—yes, he said tell Miss Holdon I am of the same faith. I don't know what that means, but when Linkenfelter says he's all right, your interests will be perfectly safe in his hands."

(THE END.)

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